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THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

YOUR CONTENT CAREER

PROSPERING AS A CONTENT PROFESSIONAL 6

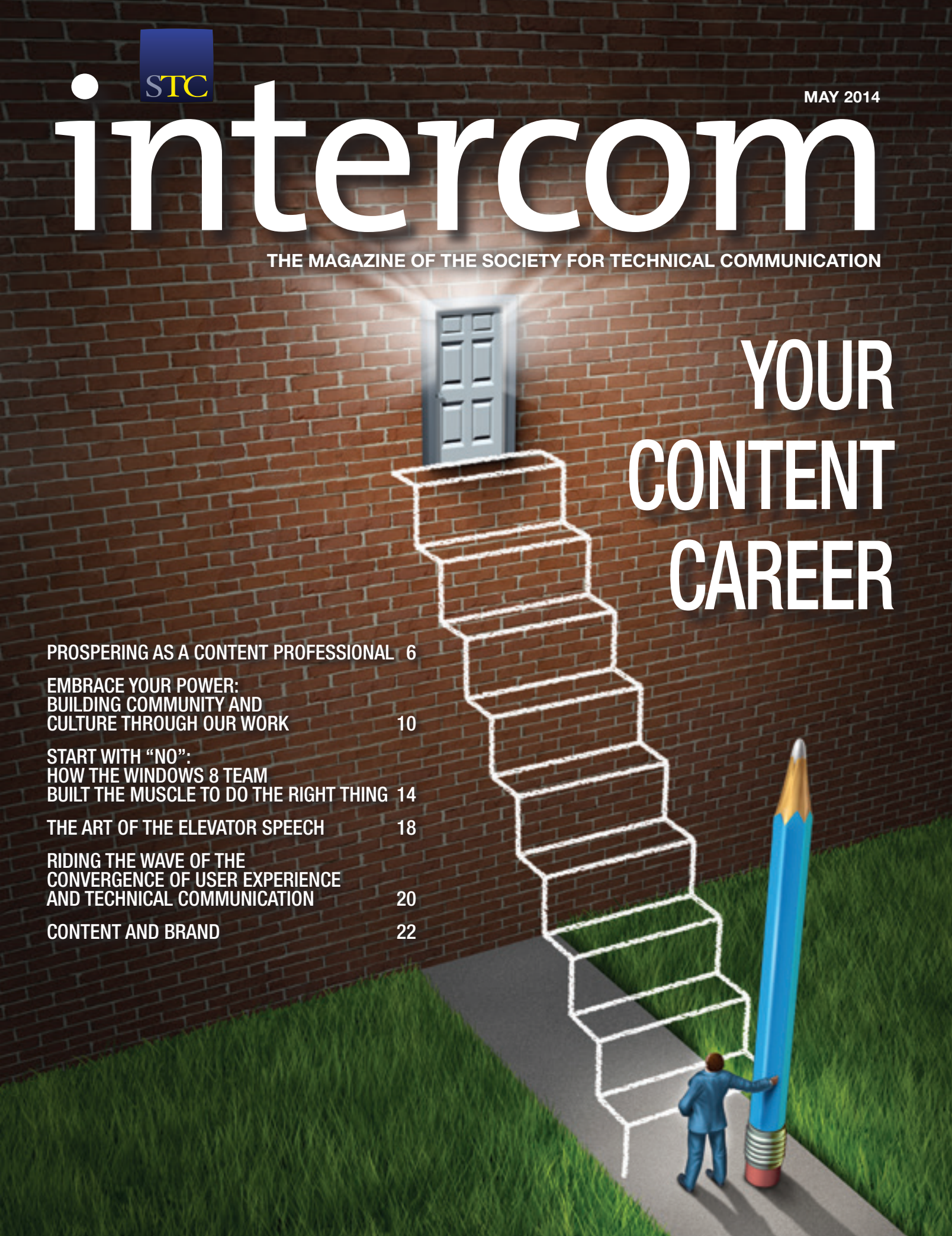
EMBRACE YOUR POWER:
BUILDING COMMUNITY AND
CULTURE THROUGH OUR WORK 10

START WITH "NO":
HOW THE WINDOWS 8 TEAM
BUILT THE MUSCLE TO DO THE RIGHT THING 14

THE ART OF THE ELEVATOR SPEECH 18

RIDING THE WAVE OF THE
CONVERGENCE OF USER EXPERIENCE
AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION 20

CONTENT AND BRAND 22



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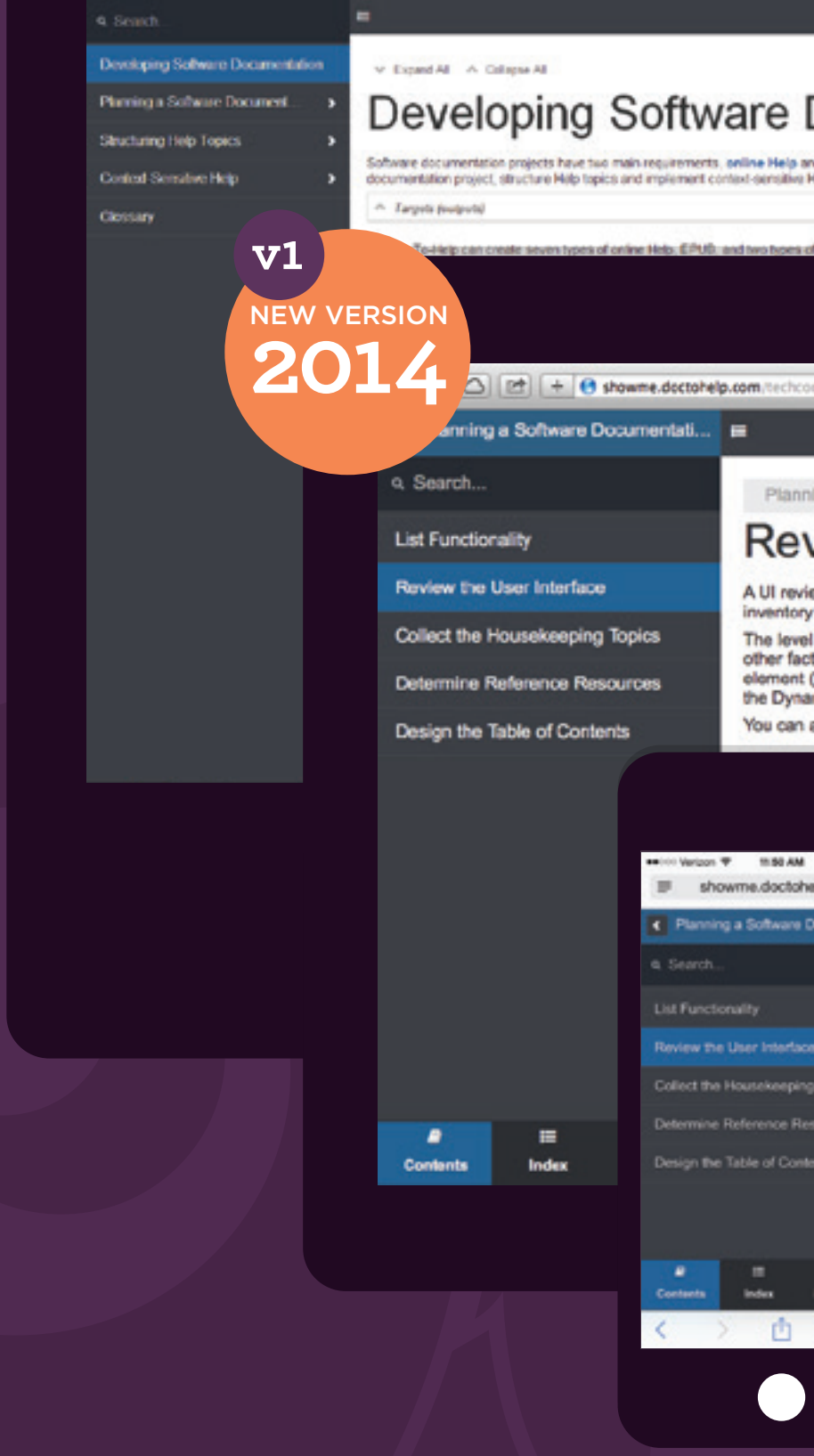

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May 2014

Volume 61 | Issue 5

4 **From the Editor**

5 **From the Guest Editor**

FEATURES

YOUR CONTENT CAREER

6 **Prospering as a Content Professional**
By Chellie Campbell
Businesses need to make more money than they spend in order to stay in business. This is true for content professionals, too—we need to make money for our businesses and thereby for ourselves. Learn how to prosper as a content professional through a positive net value, knowing your worth and what to charge, and also how to raise your rates when it's time.

10 **Embrace Your Power: Building Community and Culture through Our Work**
By Clay Delk
No matter what role you take—content marketing, technical documentation, content strategy—technical communicators are in the unique position to help others understand the value of content. As a content strategist at Facebook, Clay Delk provides techniques he has learned to heighten the impact of content and to build a content community.

14 **Start with "No": How the Windows 8 Team Built the Muscle to Do the Right Thing**
By Keith Boyd
Learn how the Windows 8 team at Microsoft used a new approach—selectively saying "no"—to meet the needs of developers; increase customer satisfaction; provide more comprehensive, scenario-based guidance; and expand the catalog of apps in the Windows Store.

18 **The Art of the Elevator Speech**
By Debra Johnson
Everyone can use an elevator pitch to explain what they do at work. Given its depth and breadth, an elevator speech about technical communication may be particularly valuable within your company, especially if you can give concrete examples of how technical communication affects the bottom line.

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20 Riding the Wave of the Convergence of User Experience and Technical Communication
By Pam Noreault
Technical communication is a part of the total user experience. How can companies converge technical communication and user experience design to engage customers? By following four easy steps: 1) learn the TC and UX approaches, 2) find opportunities for engaging with customers, 3) create a customer engagement strategy, and 4) measure success and report results.

22 Content and Brand
By Alan J. Porter
Every piece of content you produce is part of your brand. And every interaction with your content is a brand experience. Your content should reflect your brand promise and reinforce that brand experience. How does a brand promote loyalty and repeated buying cycles? What exactly do we mean when we talk about a brand?

SOCIETY PAGES

24 STC Individual Awards and Honors

27 STC Community Awards and Honors

30 List of Exhibitors

COLUMNS

THE STRATEGIC IA
31 Content Competency: How to Know If You Have It, and How to Get It If You Don't
By Andrea L. Ames and Alyson Riley

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES
35 Multimedia Instructional Videos: Considering the Value of Intercultural Communication
By Janine M. Butler
Edited by Kirk St.Amant

DEPARTMENTS

FYI
38 Mark Your Calendar
Organization Events Across the Globe

MY JOB
39 Practicing What I Preach
By Jack Molisani

ADVERTISERS

40-C3	Adobe
C2	Doc-To-Help
2, C4	MadCap Software
23	MK Graphics
17	SDL
13	WebWorks

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A Note from the Editor

I AM PLEASED to present a guest-edited issue of *Intercom* by Jack Molisani on career development and achieving prosperity as a content professional. Looking at the ways technical communicators currently promote their work and request compensation, Jack has compared where technical communicators are in actual performance with their potential performance, or where they want to be. Through the articles by industry leaders he has collected here, Jack shows that technical communicators have the tools at their disposal to become powerful organizational change agents.

Jack started his career as a project officer in the United States Air Force, went on to be a sales engineer, technical writer, manager of technical documentation, and owner of a technical writing and staffing firm. He's been on both sides of the interview desk as a staff employee, an independent contractor, and a documentation and training manager.

Jack has a degree in computer engineering from Tulane University and is the president of ProSpring Technical Staffing, a staffing agency specializing in computer engineers and content professionals. He also produces The LavaCon Conference on Content Strategy and User Experience. He is an STC Fellow and a member of the Project Management Institute, User Experience Professionals, and Meeting Planners International. He has just published his first book, *Be The Captain of Your Career: A New Approach To Career Planning and Development.*

Given his work and life experiences, Jack feels it is his job to predict what people will need to know one to two years out (and beyond), and then give them the tools they need to get there. In this issue of *Intercom*, Jack provides readers with much fodder for growth and the suggested tools they should be acquiring and using. Thank you, Jack, for sharing your expertise with us!

I'm also pleased to launch a new column this month—Student Perspectives edited by Kirk St.Amant. Contributors to the column are currently enrolled students or recent graduates. To write for the column, email Dr. St.Amant at *stamantk@ecu.edu*.

Liz Pohland

—Liz Pohland
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From the Guest Editor

Bridging the Chasm: Achieving Prosperity as a Content Professional

I'VE BEEN ADVOCATING that content professionals—including everyone from content strategists to writers to other technical communicators like visual artists (who are absolutely communicating technical information, just not with words)—need to do a better job of promoting their good works and demanding excellent compensation for the value they bring to their organizations.

But my above statement conveys part of the problem: we're making *progress*, but it's taking years and (in my oh-so-quiet and patient opinion) not moving fast enough.

Have you heard the expression, "The cobbler's son has no shoes"? It means that the village cobbler is so busy making shoes for others that he doesn't have time to make them for his own family. Could it be that we're so busy promoting the good works of others that we're not promoting our own, even though we know we should be?

Gap Analysis

The term *gap analysis* means looking at where you are (or your production is) versus where you want to be. Once you have identified the gaps between where you are and where you want to be, you can create a plan for bridging the chasm.

In preparing this issue, I looked at where I thought technical communicators are versus where we should be, then set as a goal to present not just some "pie in the sky" theoretical idea of what we should be doing but to find people in our industry who are currently doing it with the tools and talents that we already have in our core competencies.

My gap analysis identified the following areas for improvement. From my experience as owner of a technical writing and staffing firm, I find that most technical communicators:

- Tend to wait for someone to praise or reward them ("my work should speak for itself"), not *demand* attention, *ask* for a raise, etc.
- Agree to do everything asked of them but then complain that they aren't appreciated.
- Think they don't have power to affect change (otherwise they would promote their good works and demand a raise!).
- Do not articulate the value they bring to organizations, even when asked.
- Fail to predict trends in the industry and proactively take advantage of those trends.

To help propel readers into becoming powerful organizational change agents, I recruited the following industry leaders to share their hard-won lessons learned.

Chellie Campbell, author of *The Wealthy Spirit* and *Zero to Zillionaire*, writes about how you can achieve prosperity as a content professional. Clay Delk, a content strategist at Facebook, explains how to embrace your power and affect organizational change. Keith Boyd, the principal director of content services at Microsoft, shows how his team transformed developer documentation at Microsoft by first learning how to say "no."

Debra Johnson, the president of the Orlando–Central Florida STC Chapter and the technical communication lead at Wyndham Vacation Ownership, writes about the art of the elevator speech. Pam Noreault, a senior user experience content specialist at ACI Worldwide, writes about riding the wave of the convergence of user experience and technical communication.

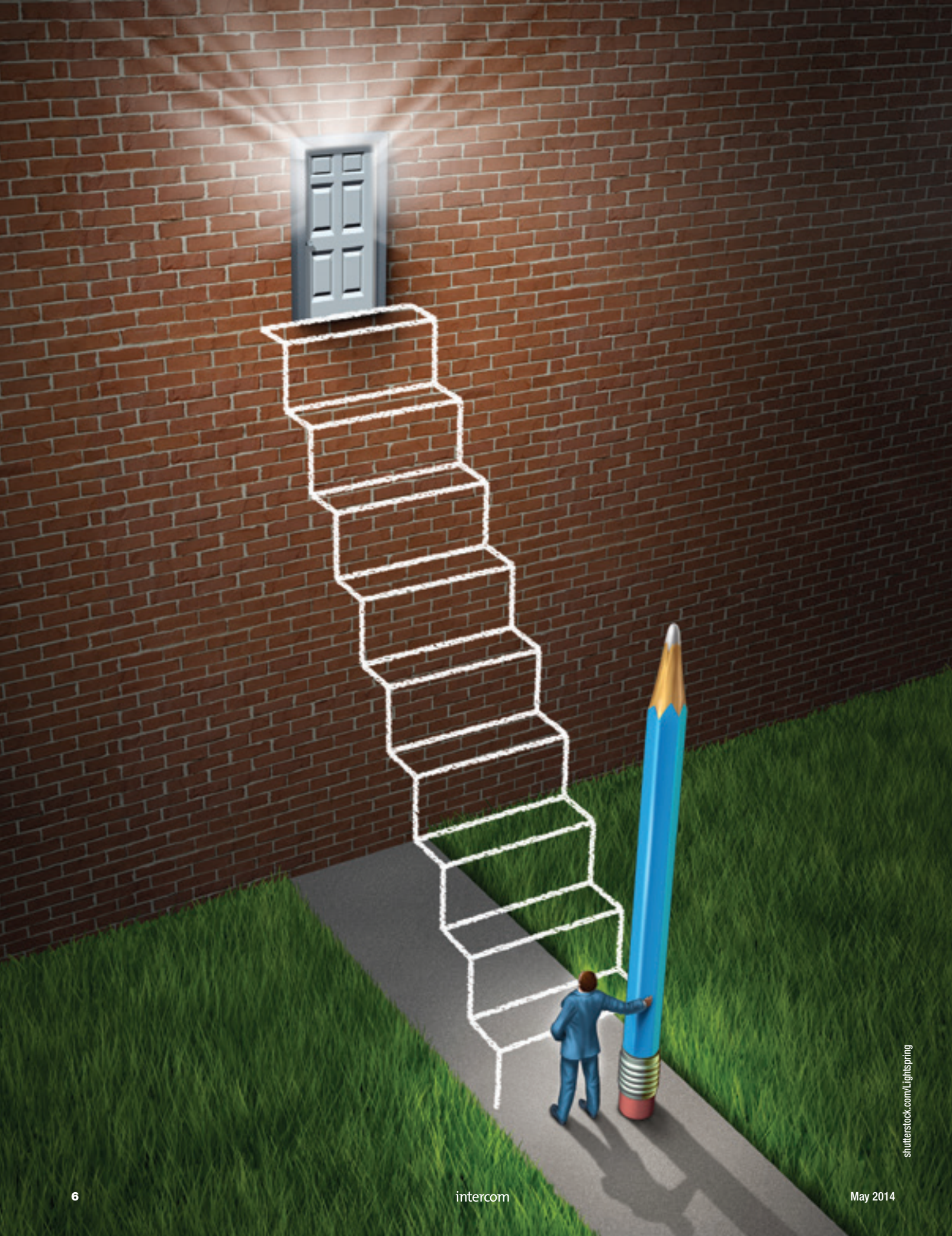
Over my career I've made many mistakes (some larger than others), but that's how you learn. Keep what works, change or discard what doesn't, and practice, practice, *practice* until you are an expert in your field—and then make darn sure you promote your good works.

Even if you have a publicist or (more likely these days) a social media marketer, you are still the source of your professional amazingness.

Do your own personal gap analysis. Record where you are now, set goals for where you want to be this time next year, then create and execute a strategy to get there.

And take notes along the way. I want to see *your* article in next year's issue!

— Jack Molisani
Jack@ProSpringStaffing.com



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Prospering as a Content Professional

By CHELLIE CAMPBELL

WHEN I STARTED writing this article on financial stress reduction for content professionals, the following quote from Stuart Wilde came to mind:

> *If you don't concentrate on counting the money, people soon realize that money is not the focus of your consciousness, so they give you everything other than money: kudos, acclaim, praise, etc., etc. And sooner or later you'll be in trouble.*

Should money be the focus of your work consciousness? Let's discuss.

We All Have Customers

No matter if you are an independent contractor, temporary employee, or full-time staff, most likely you work for an organization that sells products or services. With the noted exception of venture-funded startups, organizations need to make more money than they spend in order to continue in business.

The same thing can be said about you: You should make more money for your customer than they spend on you, or there's no reason for them to use your services. Keep in mind I'm not just talking about your salary—the cost of "you" also includes benefits, education and training, travel to conferences and client meetings, and the overhead of your workspace, among other things.

On the other hand, keep in mind you also have another "customer"—you. Just as you need to make money for your employer, you also need to make money for yourself. And not just enough to get by, but enough to maintain a quality of life that doesn't depend on maxing out your credit cards to get the things you need and want.

In Charles Dickens's 1850 novel, *David Copperfield*, character Wilkins Micawber describes this beautifully:

> *Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen pounds nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds nought and six, result misery.*

So the secret to financial stress reduction at work (that is, a good income and reasonable job security) is to make lots of money for your company so they have lots of money with which to pay you.

Have a Positive Net Value

When I say "make lots of money for your company," I really mean have a net value to your organization that is greater than the cost to employ you.

If you are providing content that is part of a software user interface, you are clearly part of a development team that is creating a product your company can sell (which generates revenue). Ditto if you create documentation that consumers use after they purchase the product.

An even better way to add value would be to help write content that the sales and marketing teams use to sell the product. That makes two ways you are generating revenue—by attracting new customers and creating the products they buy.

Another way to have a positive impact on your company's bottom line is through cost avoidance. One example would be figuring out how to reduce production costs (such as implementing a content management or controlled language system to reduce production costs); another is

So the secret to financial stress reduction at work (that is, a good income and reasonable job security) is to make lots of money for your company so they have lots of money with which to pay you.

creating training materials for which your company can charge customers.

And let's not forget about "big ticket" cost avoidance, such as preventing your company from being sued for millions by someone misusing the product. One might think it is common sense not to put a screwdriver into the back of an operating piece of machinery, but sometimes you need to remind people to put the device out of reach of children and others who might not know better.

Know Your Worth

In the game of making money, financial reports are how you keep score; ditto for justifying a raise or promotion. It's not enough to *think* you deserve a raise, you have to *show* you do. Here's an example from my book, *The Wealthy Spirit*:

> Sally's eyes were snapping and her face burned with resentment. "I've been working for these people for five years and have done wonders for them, but they are so stingy they are only giving me a 3 percent raise!" She was so hot she could barely sit in her chair.
>
> It was a beautiful spring day, and we were sitting outdoors at the local restaurant. I knew something was wrong the minute she arrived. Sally was the Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce and was quite visible in the community. She did a wonderful job, and I had seen the growth in membership and programs of the Chamber during her tenure. I had no idea she wasn't well paid.
>
> "Tell me everything," I said, "but start at the beginning. How long have you been working in this job?"
>
> "Five years," she exclaimed, "starting as a part-time secretary. I've been full-time for the past four years and have taken on many more duties and responsibilities. I've tripled their membership and their budget, but they still only give me tiny annual cost-of-living raises based on my starting salary as a secretary!"
>
> She was seething. "I'm going to quit!"
>
> "Take a deep breath and relax a minute," I coached. "You can always quit—that's a last resort option. But you like the job except for the low pay, so why don't we work together to try to get you the money you deserve?" She thought about that for a minute, then agreed it couldn't hurt to try.
>
> Over the next couple of weeks, I coached Sally on how to get a raise.
>
> First, I told her to lose the resentment—anger doesn't sell. People just get defensive. Not being well-paid was her responsibility and hers alone. She had been waiting for the Board of Directors to recognize her contributions and voluntarily significantly raise her salary.
>
> But she had not given them the facts and figures they needed to justify the increase.
>
> Now she understood, so she put together a presentation for the board that outlined every achievement and the dollar amounts her contributions had made to the bottom line of the organization. She did her research and discovered the pay rates for the same position at similar organizations. She prepared written comparisons of the Chamber budgets for the five years she had been working for them.
>
> We met again at lunch just before her presentation to the board, so she could practice her delivery. "You haven't been paying me enough money!" she started out, and I stopped her. "No resentment, remember? It would have been nice if they had thought that you should be paid more based on the job you have done, but you weren't asking for more, so they thought you were happy. Try it again—be nice, be charming, and be strong at the same time."
>
> She did a masterful job and I told her so. She looked powerful, professional, and determined.
>
> She got a 35 percent raise in salary. We celebrated together that day!

We just looked at how to negotiate a raise if you are a salaried employee. Now let's talk about setting your bill rate if you are an independent contractor or business owner.

Not Charging Enough Can Drive Away as Many Customers as Charging Too Much

Years ago, a friend of mine decided to go into business for herself doing computer consulting. She told me that she had a man who promised to send her a lot of business, so she called him up to tell him she was ready.

> "What are you going to charge?" he asked.
>
> "$40 per hour," she replied hesitantly.
>
> "Then I can't send you any business," he stated.
>
> "Why?" she asked. "Is that too much?"
>
> "No," he replied, "it's too little. Any computer consultant worth anything is charging $100 per hour and up. I can't ruin my reputation by referring people to someone who only charges $40—no one will think you're any good."

The same datum could be applied to senior content professionals.

Arm yourself with numbers—how much revenue do you generate for your customers?

You can do yourself irreparable harm if you charge less than market prices. What do you think when people charge too little? I tend to think they are either brand new in their profession or maybe not very good at it—or they don't understand their worth in the marketplace and need some coaching.

Arm yourself with numbers—how much revenue do you generate for your customers? How much in avoided costs? Heck, you could *double* your rates and still save your company money in the long run.

Let's look at some examples.

Raise Your Rates

When I started my workshops back in 1990, I only charged $200. I just made that number up with no evidence or research to support it. I had never taught a workshop before, so I thought I should keep the price low so I could more easily get people to sign up for it. When it was successful, I upped my price the next time—to $350. Then I met a man who taught workshops for $650, and another for $850. So I raised my price to match what I saw others were charging.

Every time I had a price jump to a number that was scary for me, it took me awhile to become comfortable saying the new number. I remember having a sales conversation with a man who was an insurance broker, who wanted to come but wasn't sure it was the right time.

"You'll save money if you register now," I encouraged him. "After the first of the year, I'm raising the price to $1,000."

"Oh, Chellie," he scoffed, "$850 is $1,000. It's not that different."

I thanked him for the tip! And didn't feel badly about my new price after that. But it didn't roll off my tongue comfortably, so I soon raised the price to $1,250 because I could say "twelve-fifty" more easily than "a thousand dollars." I made myself another $250 per person just because of that.

Jack Molisani told me a similar story about when he started as a technical writer. "When I started in the industry I didn't know what to charge, so I took a contract at the rate they offered me. I raised my rate $5/hour at the end of that contract and after each subsequent contract. Eventually, I started losing contracts because I priced myself out of the local market, so I lowered my rate—but just for a while. As the economy improved, I continued increasing my bill rate at the end of each project."

Another friend told me this story: "I went on an interview once to do a fixed-bid writing project. I had beautiful examples in my portfolio that showed I had the exact skills they needed. When they asked for a bid, I said, 'That will take four weeks at $75 an hour.'"

They replied, "Oh no, the most we can pay a writer is $50 an hour."

Half kiddingly he said, "Alright, then it will take *eight* weeks at $50 an hour."

They replied, "OK."

Find out what is important to your client when negotiating, then work out a deal that is a win-win for both sides.

This company was more concerned about not going over some arbitrary bill rate than it was about the total cost of the project. So in essence my friend did what they wanted: he spread four weeks of work over eight calendar weeks, billed the negotiated price, and made more money for himself than he would have by insisting on his original bill rate.

The lesson? Find out what is important to your client when negotiating, then work out a deal that is a win-win for both sides.

You're Worth It, Remember?

Pierre de Beaumarchais once said, "Where love is concerned, too much is not even enough." And I thought, why not ask for too much? Too much love, too much money, too much happiness, too much fun?

How often do we restrict our reality to lower levels of possibility by not asking for enough? Obediah Thomas, a professional comic, once posted this on Facebook: "Always ask for more. More than you think they will offer. More than they do offer. More than you made last time. More than you would settle for. More than you think others are charging."

Alan Cohen, in his book, *A Deep Breath of Life*, tells the story of a man who died and went to Heaven. God was showing him around but one door he passed by saying, "You don't want to go in there." Of course, the man is curious, and begs God to let him in. God agrees, but tells him he'll be sorry.

The man gapes at the room filled with amazing treasures, and wanders among them until he spies a Rolls Royce. He runs over to it saying, "This is the car I always wanted!" Then he sees his own name engraved on the dashboard, and asks God why he didn't get this car.

God answers, "Because you asked for an Oldsmobile."

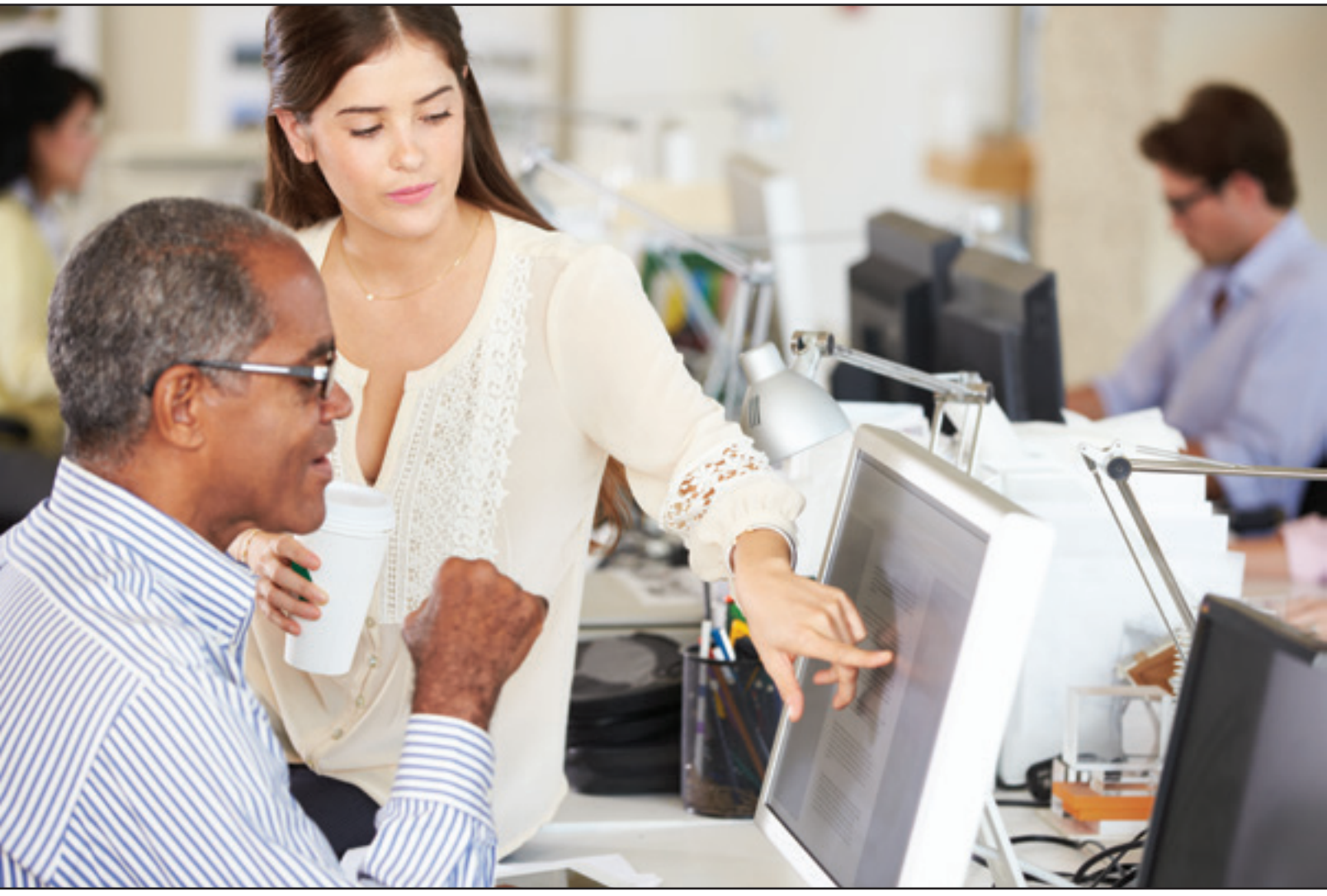
What do you really want? It may already be packaged up, ready, and waiting for you. All you have to do is ask for it. Your time is a finite resource, and for that you need to be paid top dollar.

A rising tide lifts all boats. It's time to ask for a bigger boat!

CHELLIE CAMPBELL (chellie@chellie.com) *is the creator of the Financial Stress Reduction Workshops, and author of* The Wealthy Spirit, Zero to Zillionaire, *and* From Wealth to Worry: A Woman's Guide to Financial Success Without the Stress. *She has been prominently quoted as a financial expert in* The Los Angeles Times, Good Housekeeping, Lifetime, Essence, Woman's World, *and more than 50 popular books.*

Embrace Your Power:

Building Community and Culture through Our Work



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By CLAY DELK

FROM MARKETING CONTENT to technical documentation to content strategy, we're in a unique position to have an impact inside and outside our organizations. We communicate directly with our customers and our internal colleagues and, as a result, we often have more influence on the culture in our companies than almost anyone else.

Even so, most of us have experiences where content has been treated as an afterthought, as extra polish, or (even worse) as a sort of magic fairy dust that can make up for bad design.

Helping people understand the value of content can be a slow process, but it's not impossible. I've experienced many of the highs and lows of this profession as I've moved from being the only copywriter at a small agency to the only content strategist at a fairly large company, to one of more than 25 content strategists at Facebook.

Here are some ways I've learned to heighten the impact of my content and build community through my work.

Set the Standards

We have the opportunity to set standards around how we talk about our companies, our products, and our customers. Even if you don't control the broader marketing messages or branding decisions, you make conscious choices about the language your company uses every day. In product interfaces, support documentation, sales materials, and internal communications, your language is a key part of the overall customer experience.

Content standards are about more than just title casing and serial commas. Clear standards around word choice, phrasing, and use can keep your communications consistent and can shape the way your company thinks about its customers.

When I joined the ads team at Facebook, one of the first things I did was write an explanation for why the term *targeting* should refer to an ad, not to the audience. So advertisers don't target their *audiences,* they target their *ads.* And, more specifically, they target the ads *to* an audience, not *at* an audience.

This phrasing builds a level of respect for the people who will see the ads as well as the people who will make them. I wasn't the first person to make this point. But as a content strategist on ads, it was up to me to make it a standard.

The difference between "to" and "at" may seem minor, but the ways we talk about the people who use our products has a real effect on how we think about them, how we treat them, and how we build and design for them.

Embrace Your Expertise

Writing is a learning process. As we write, we also collect, organize, and process information. We craft stories from the things we learn.

My first job out of school was as a copywriter for a small agency, working with real estate, healthcare, and a variety of small-business clients. In the process of researching projects, writing copy for websites, and creating sales materials, I learned more about those clients than almost anyone in the company.

Clear standards around word choice, phrasing, and use can keep your communications consistent and can shape the way your company thinks about its customers.

Before long, I was answering questions for designers, account managers, and even the clients themselves. Pretty soon, I was leading broader branding, strategy, and design decisions.

As content strategists, we must learn everything we can about the projects we're working on. We have to know how something works, how it doesn't, what's possible, and what isn't. Otherwise, it's hard to refer to ourselves as strategists. We're used to collecting that information and sharing it with the people outside our companies. But we should also be doing the same thing for the people *inside* our companies.

Look for ways to share the information you have with other teams in your organization—sales, marketing, support, leadership—and you may be surprised to see how much people value your expertise and support your efforts.

Ask Dumb Questions

This may seem like it contradicts my previous point, but it's also important to embrace the things you don't know. When I'm working on new projects (or even old ones), there are times when I feel like everyone understands how something works except me. Or I assume there's a backstory about why we can't do things a certain way, and everyone else knows it.

When I swallow my pride and ask those questions, I get honest answers that help me do my job better. And there's almost always someone else in the room who needed that information as well.

It's our job to give our readers the most simple, straightforward answers to their questions. Sometimes those questions are detailed, technical points that need really granular answers. Sometimes they're just answering "What *is* this thing?" or "Why did *that* happen?"

Even if you're worried that your question might sound simple to an engineer or an analyst, remember that the answer is likely something that your readers will need to know.

Showing vulnerability to your colleagues helps you deepen your relationships with them while also building empathy for the people using your products. Being upfront about what you don't know is the fastest way to learn.

Ask Tough Questions

The true benefit of asking simple questions is that they often lead to the tough ones. If you have a lot of basic questions

As a content professional, make connections across teams, learn from your teammates, and use your expertise to help people do their jobs better.

about functions and features, it can be a sign of much bigger conceptual or strategic issues that need to be discussed.

When you discuss the basic concepts and premises that your products are founded on, you can create space for dialogue and help your team think about your product in a new way.

When you're talking with clients, stakeholders, or subject matter experts, you're the advocate for your readers. Readers need answers to the simple questions, but they need answers to the hard ones, too.

Ask about the decisions that led to certain features or functionality. Ask about differences from and similarities to your competitors. Ask the questions that your readers would ask. Then, ask questions about the answers you get. That's where the real breakthroughs usually happen.

Build Your Content Community

Before moving to the San Francisco Bay area, I spent eight years in Austin, TX. In that time, I was fortunate to be a part of an active community of content professionals and business owners from a variety of industries. The Austin Content MeetUps and discussions sharpened my understanding of content strategy and helped me get better at my job. But in my daily work, I still felt like the only person who did what I did.

So I organized a monthly meeting for anyone who worked on any kind of content in our company—marketing writers, social media managers, support content writers, everybody. The first meeting was pretty social. We introduced ourselves, described the types of things we worked on, and we finally put faces to the names we'd been sending emails to. After a few meetings, though, we began to touch on broader topics that plagued content across our company.

Most importantly, when someone had a question or concern about a project or feature, they had a community to reach out to. As we started working on projects or features, we could go to the group and quickly bring together the people who needed to be involved.

Be Open to Feedback

One of the best aspects of an internal content community is the ability to get feedback about our work from other professionals. But what about feedback from people outside our area of expertise?

It's easy to take it personally when someone gives us feedback about our work. Writing is such a personal experience that even when we're writing documentation or website content, we can become attached and defensive about it. But honest feedback is one of the most valuable ways we can make our writing better.

We use Facebook Groups to collect internal feedback on almost everything we're working on. Just recently, I saw a post from an engineer in one of these feedback groups that was critical of something I'd been working on for a few months.

The feature he was responding to had actually been one of the most challenging parts of the project, and I was interested in an outside perspective. So instead of defending my decisions, I asked him for more details. I shared some of the other directions we had considered and asked for his thoughts on those as well.

His responses helped lead us to a new approach that challenged some fundamental decisions we had made months before, but it ultimately created a much better product, which means a better experience for our advertisers.

Be Diplomatic

This final piece of advice applies to all the others. Whatever you do to promote your work, share your content, or influence company decisions, you must do it with diplomacy.

There's often little difference between being the person who constantly asks tough questions about your product and the person who leads the team to have tough discussions about your product … between the person who constantly corrects capitalization and phrasing in your content and the person who keeps your content polished and consistent … or between a know-it-all and a person who is in the know.

Unfortunately, the difference is often simply a matter of perception. Ask tough questions, but listen closely to the answers you get. Fix wording and naming issues, but give people information to understand why it matters. Give feedback on design and strategy, but be open to comments on your work.

Use Your Power for Good

As a content professional, make connections across teams, learn from your teammates, and use your expertise to help people do their jobs better. You'll not only help everyone realize the true value of your content, but you'll also (and more importantly) help build a culture of openness, collaboration, and sharing across your organization.

Think you don't have the power to change your organization? Think again.

CLAY DELK *is a content strategist at Facebook, where he spends his days crafting tools to make ads better for the people that create them and the people that see them. Over the last decade, Clay has worked as a copywriter and content strategist, helping businesses of all sizes connect with the people that matter to them.*

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Start with "No": How the Windows 8 Team Built the Muscle to Do the Right Thing

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By KEITH BOYD

DURING THE DEVELOPMENT of Windows 8 and Windows 8.1, I had the privilege of managing a team of 40 talented writers who were responsible for documenting a brand-new app platform. The team was comprised of dedicated and innovative professionals, with many award winners and an average tenure of 12 years in our industry. While 40 people may sound like a luxurious staffing level, consider the backdrop:

- The team was also responsible for maintaining and improving a library of legacy Windows programming documentation, over 150,000 total content assets.
- No tools existed to autogenerate the API (application programming interfaces) reference documentation for the platform, so we had to build the tools ourselves.
- Unlike iOS or Android, the Windows team decided to support multiple app models for Windows 8: HTML5 with JavaScript, XAML with C#, VB, or C++, and DirectX using C++. This meant that that programming guidance had to be created in *triplicate*.

While the team was excited and motivated at the prospect of supporting Microsoft's new mobile computing strategy, it was apparent that we lacked the resources to do everything we would like. We adopted a triage strategy and decided to apply the most resources where they would have the biggest impact.

When Windows 8 launched on 26 October 2011, the content we shipped reflected this strategy, born of pragmatism and based on irrefutable data showing that not all content assets were used equally. While it didn't come natural to many of us, by the time we shipped the content we had become adept at saying no—to our partners, to our management, and even to ourselves. We'd also become much better at interpreting data, which enabled us to focus on creating the *right* content, as opposed to all of the content we could think of.

In order to put this in proper historical perspective, step back in time to 25 October 2001 and the launch of Windows XP. In that era, Microsoft invested more on developer documentation than it does today:

- It was before the advent of Web 2.0, and there were very few websites with guidance on how to build Windows applications, services, or drivers.
- As market forces affected the Windows business, the balance of personnel investment also changed. Technical documentation budgets are a relatively easy place to plunder in favor of development, test, or project management. A noteworthy detail is that managers have been somewhat complicit in the decline of the population, mostly due to our inability to demonstrate our impact via meaningful, objective data.

Microsoft launched Windows XP with a robust and able community of programming writers, who meticulously documented the behavior of every API in the platform. In those days, programming for Windows was hardly easy, but it was straightforward and well documented. You could literally get a book and learn everything you needed to know. Our technical documentation augmented the narrative, providing deep technical detail on the many APIs that comprised the platform, but it did little to tell a story of its own. Storytelling just wasn't necessary in that era; if you were a developer seeking to build commercial software at a global scale, you really only had one choice—Windows.

Thirteen years later, Windows 8 and 8.1 ushered in an entirely new development platform, one used to build apps for deployment via the Windows Store. It supported a new matrix of programming languages, as well as three distinctly different app models. This complex matrix, coupled with a radical, new user interface, meant my team had its work cut out for it.

To maximize our effectiveness, we adopted four principles to guide our decision making:

- Less is more
- Code first
- Embrace a modern voice and tone
- Be data driven

The remainder of the article describes how we interpreted these principles to the benefit of our customers.

Less Is More

We realized early on that we needed to better educate the developers creating Windows. At the time, the Windows team consisted of more than 6,000 engineers, most of whom were building new platform capabilities and features. At Microsoft, there's long been an expectation that feature teams work directly with a programming writer to define a document plan for each release. Historically this was a confederated effort, with writers and their immediate manager empowered to negotiate the right level of investment on a per-feature basis. Unfortunately, this yielded uneven results:

- Not all features are created equal. For example, an investment in documentation for printer manufacturers doesn't yield the same return on investment as documentation targeted to game developers.
- Nearly all writers had a tendency to say yes while negotiating with their feature team counterparts. Saying no could put relationships at risk and might even affect their performance evaluation (thankfully the performance evaluation system at Microsoft was recently replaced).
- Building documentation as a collection of disparate features failed to consider how developers actually consume our content, by creating complex scenarios that span multiple features.

As a result, we started doing more deliberate capacity planning, focusing on the highest-value developer scenarios. The documentation team partnered with key allies in customer-facing teams who helped with prioritization.

In this new planning regime, writers would present their milestone plan to the entire leadership team. When proposed work items didn't align with divisional priorities or support the key customer scenarios identified by our leadership team, we said no and pushed that work to our backlog. That way, content proposals that were "nice to have" never trumped those that were critical to our customer's success. And feature teams (who once dominated our planning) were relegated to an informed participant, no longer the primary deciders of how and what was documented.

Code First

It seems so obvious: creating code samples that augment the core documentation should be a big part of the programming-writer role. However, this is easier said than done, given the enormity of our responsibilities.

At the outset of Windows 8 development, we determined that building additional customer empathy by creating apps (just like they do) would be the best way to have a truly informed content strategy. And despite how obvious that sounds, this principle was the hardest to live up to. Despite the desire and ability of the team, finding the time to write code proved incredibly difficult. Recognizing this, the team did a hard stop one month prior to general availability of Windows 8 in order to build apps using only our documentation and samples. The goal was validation, and the effort yielded over 100 content bugs (generally gaps in coverage or confusing/ambiguous language in associated reference documentation). So while "code first" made for a powerful rallying cry, it also demonstrated how difficult it is to fully realize a strategy or vision. But we did it anyway, and our documentation was better for it.

Embrace a Modern Voice and Tone

We had two goals for the voice and tone for Windows 8 developer documentation:

1. Match the new, friendlier personality of Windows

2. Remain an authoritative source for developers

To support those goals, we adopted four voice principles to better support a more "modern" developer audience:

- **Approachable**. We're talking on your level, and we're here to help.
- **Focused.** We get to the point, fast.
- **Honest**. We acknowledge pain, frustration, and complexity when needed.
- **Relevant**. We're aware you work in a world that isn't defined by Microsoft.

These principles manifest in innumerable ways throughout our technical documentation, with simpler, more direct language (I coined the phrase "collegial, not colloquial" to describe our approach), greater use of graphics and video, and concise topics that focused on the *how* as opposed to the *why*. After all, very few developers *choose* to read our documentation—they generally consume it by necessity and only when they're stuck. Being mindful of their time and treating them with compassion and respect was a key goal for the team (see Figures 1 and 2).

A problem has been detected and Windows has been shut down to prevent damage
to your computer.
DRIVER_IRQL_NOT_LESS_OR_EQUAL
If this is the first time you've seen this Stop error screen,
restart your computer. If this screen appears again, follow
these steps:
Check to make sure any new hardware or software is properly installed.
If this is a new installation, ask your hardware or software manufacturer
for any Windows updates you might need.
If problems continue, disable or remove any newly installed hardware
or software. Disable BIOS memory options such as caching or shadowing.
If you need to use Safe Mode to remove or disable components, restart
your computer, press F8 to select Advanced Startup Options, and then
select Safe Mode.
Technical information:
*** STOP: 0x0000000A (0x0000000C,0x00000002,0x00000000,0xF86B5A89)
*** gv3.sys - Address F86B5A89 base at F86B5000, DateStamp 3dd991eb
Beginning dump of physical memory
Physical memory dump complete.
Contact your system administrator or technical support group for further
assistance.

Figure 1. Before (Windows 7 and earlier)

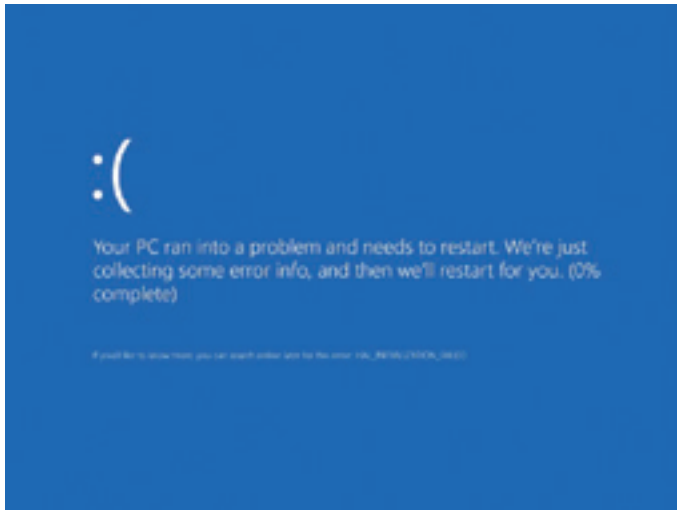

:(
Your PC ran into a problem and needs to restart. We're just
collecting some error info, and then we'll restart for you. (0%
complete)

Figure 2. After (Windows 8)

Be Data Driven

In the early days of Windows 8 planning, we discovered something interesting: 10% of API reference topics accounted for 90+% of the page views. This pattern, which held universally across all supported programming models, clearly showed that APIs were not used equally. The following figure shows how this looks for the Windows Runtime documentation.

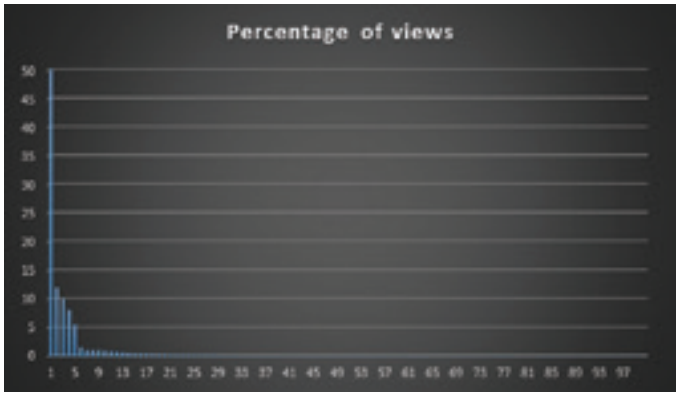


Figure 3. Percentage of Views

As you can see from Figure 3, the top 1% of topics (the horizontal axis) account for 50% of all page views across the entire portfolio (the vertical axis. The long tail begins at 10%, just like the model predicted (I suspect this model is true for other developer platforms, including iOS and Android). Some of the topics in the long tail are viewed less than a dozen times per month. Some of them don't get viewed at all. As a leadership team, we decided to invest most of our resources in the topics that comprised the "head" (top 1%) and the "neck" (the top 10%). There's simply insufficient ROI to invest heavily in topics in the long tail.

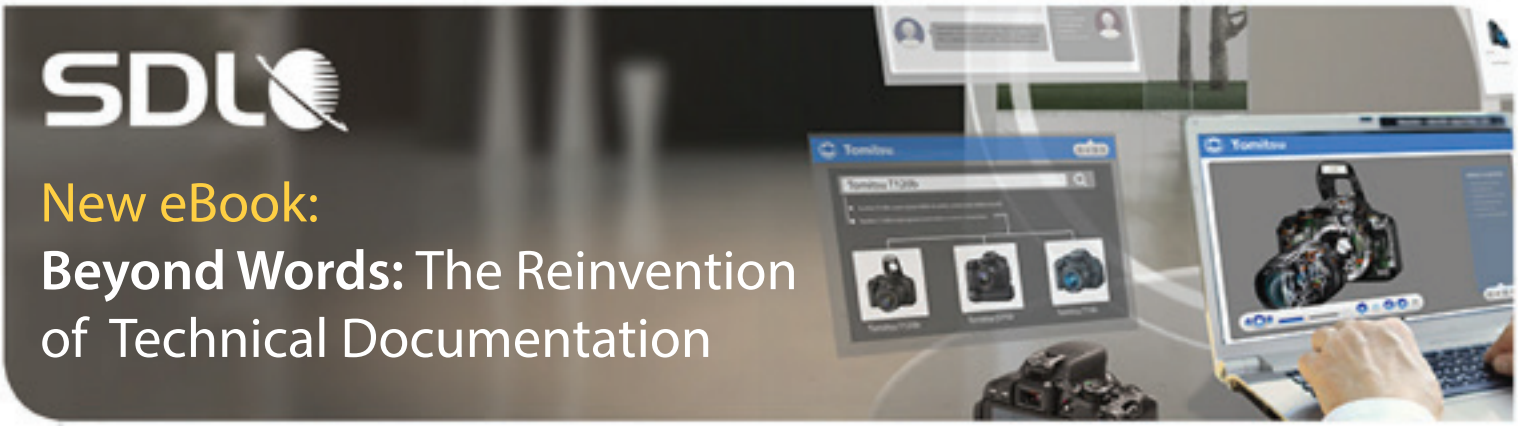
The Bottom Line

The turning point came when we finally confronted that we can't do it all. With a limited number of writers supporting an ever-expanding portfolio of content assets, taking on the right work, selectively saying no, and focusing on the highest-value scenarios helped us to better meet the needs of our developers.

Increased customer satisfaction, more comprehensive scenario-based guidance, and additional code samples lead to an expanding catalog of apps in the Windows Store.

Our new approach worked.

KEITH BOYD *is a 14-year veteran of the Microsoft Corporation. He recently joined the cloud and enterprise division as a principal director in the content services and international team managing a group of programming-writers focused on Microsoft Azure and Visual Studio. When he's not in Redmond, he's at home with his wife, Leslie, and their three boys: Aiden, Riley, and Drew.*



New eBook:
Beyond Words: The Reinvention of Technical Documentation

A complete customer experience encompasses every touchpoint a customer has with your company across their entire journey, including help and support. Is your current technical documentation up to the challenge?

Our eBook explores how to move beyond words and reinvent technical documentation in a variety of key areas, with practical tips you can take back to your organization today. Topics include:

Content Optimization & Collaboration
Editing and reviewing content can be a challenge. Are your subject matter experts empowered to easily contribute, or are they tangled up in processes that keep your best content from seeing the light of day?

Rich Media
These days, video is in demand from customers seeking better support. Unless you can integrate it directly with your existing documentation much of the value, like improving self-service, is lost.

Rich Data
Do you know how customers are consuming your content? Usage metadata, direct feedback and ratings can provide guidance and direction on content effectiveness.

Be Mobile
Customers expect content to be available all the time, even when they're on the go. Therefore, how you deliver your content to mobile devices must be thoughtful and strategic in order to be successful.

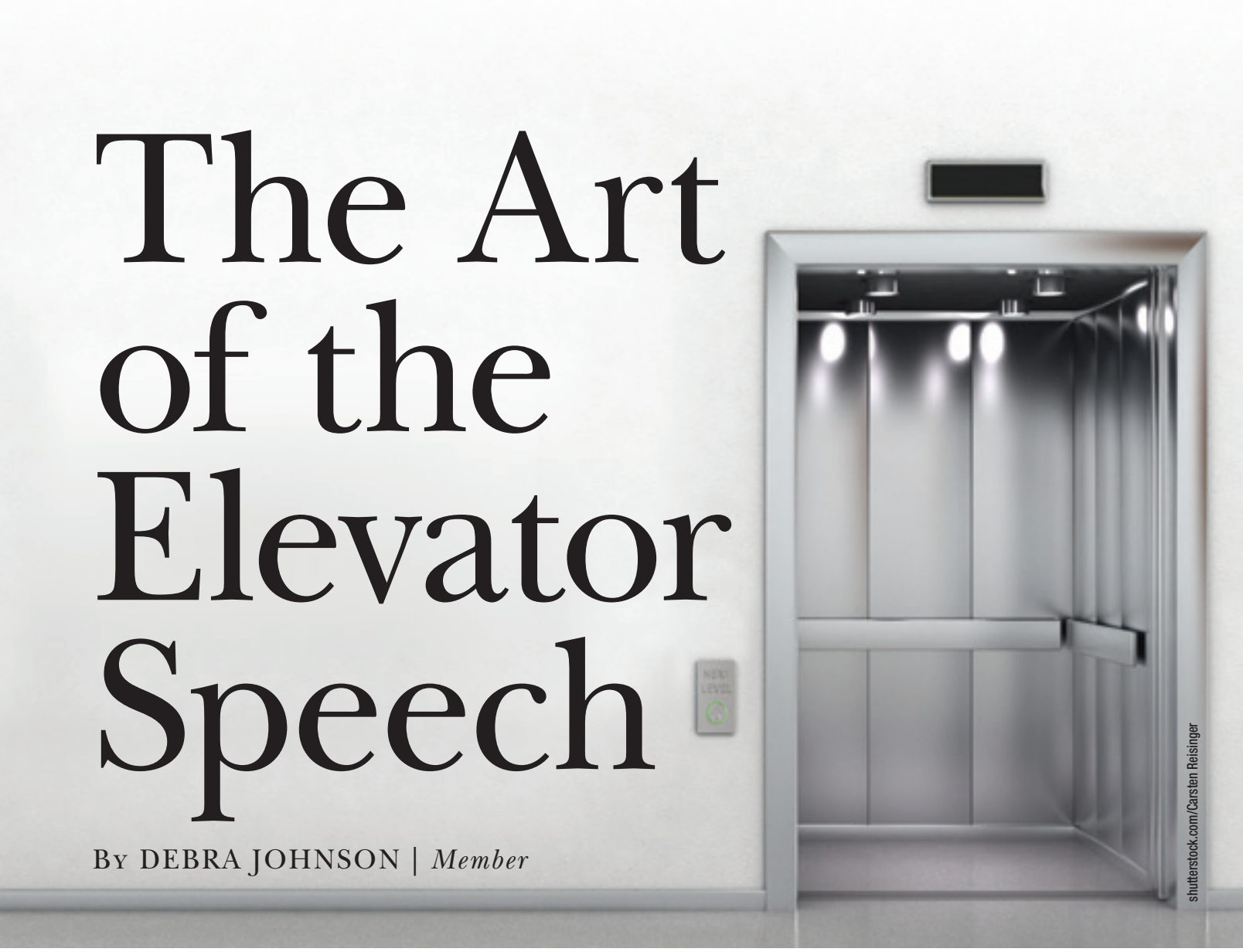
Be Global
Translating documentation in multiple languages is only half the battle. Are you maximizing localization efficiency? Are you considering culture and channel as you go global?

Be Social
Give + Take = Social Success. Share your content to all relevant social networks, and take heed to what customer communities are saying.

Content Discovery
Developing great content is one thing, but are you making that content easily findable? Improve content discovery by implementing automated recommendations.

Download the eBook at www.sdl.com/BeyondWords

The Art of the Elevator Speech



By DEBRA JOHNSON | *Member*

"HI, I'M DEBRA JOHNSON, the technical communication lead…. What is technical communication? I'd be happy to tell you.…"

It's often not easy to establish relationships with executives in a company, so I am always quick to chat with coworkers during our elevator ride at work. You never know when you're going to meet someone pivotal to your future, and I believe it's important to have your elevator speech rehearsed and ready.

What Is an Elevator Pitch?

Even in the best of times it can be hard to get resources for your team—after all, there are only so many financial resources to go around. But the quest for funds can be difficult, if not impossible, when decision makers don't know what we do or how we add value.

We want them to take notice, especially when trying to establish our worth within a company. When you have the opportunity to speak to a decision maker, even if it's for just a minute or two, you want to maximize that time. You need to have an "elevator speech" ready for that moment when you have their undivided attention.

According to Wikipedia, an elevator pitch or speech is "a short summary used to quickly and simply define a person, profession, product, service, organization, or event and its value proposition."

The name elevator pitch reflects the idea that it should be possible to deliver a summary in the timespan of an elevator ride, approximately thirty seconds to two minutes. The term itself comes from a scenario of an accidental meeting with someone important in the elevator. If the conversation inside the elevator in those few seconds is interesting, the conversation would continue after the elevator ride, and end in an exchange of business cards, a scheduled meeting, etc.

These mini mission statements can happen in an elevator, a meeting room, in the cafeteria, or at a team-building event—just about anywhere you find yourself explaining what you do. But what is most important, along with your pitch, is to have an example that drives your message home—the numbers, the meat and potatoes.

After 20 years in this profession, I have my pitch pretty well mastered; it can adapt to the moment or audience and it usually ties into a frustrating workplace situation, such

as information stored on multiple "collaborative document storage sites" with no search capabilities, or deciphering what engineers have written, or information silos.

Those who ask "What is technical communication?" often attempt to answer the question without waiting for a response. "Is that the same as technical writing?" For me, I simply say, "Well, yes, we do technical writing, but we also do content analysis and design, determine content delivery strategies, perform usability testing, use project management skills, and also counsel others on correct authoring techniques."

Add an Example

Part of my message usually describes how we have modernized the content creation, delivery, and storage processes, so everyone knows where to go to get the information they need (especially about technology). That message takes two to three minutes to convey. Then, if you have time, add an example that includes numbers.

I usually pull from a countless number of examples. However, the one that has proven to be the most effective and easiest to comprehend quickly could apply to any company. My example comes from past employment, in the form of a company-wide email that was distributed with an attached instruction document. This email announced the company was implementing a new security process and the date it would occur (two weeks in the future).

The email had a document attached that an engineer had written instructing how to implement this new process. Two weeks later came the second email giving us the go-ahead to implement. This email referred to the instructions emailed two weeks prior.

Being in IT for most of my career, I was somewhat familiar with this new security process the company was about to implement, so I thought this would be a piece of cake. After finally locating the first email, I tried to follow the instructions the engineer had created. It didn't work.

The instructions (written by an engineer) were missing two steps, the steps that were listed were out of order, and the required prerequisites were missing. I finally gave up and called the help desk. Within 10 minutes I was up and running, but it was the help desk that had to implement the new process. I still didn't have the missing or correct information.

As you read the rest of this example, keep in mind that each time someone engages the help desk there is a cost to handle that call.

Over the next couple of weeks, the help desk supervisor sent a daily email to IT itemizing all the help desk calls received related to this implementation. In the email, he described how many calls they received each day, how long each one took to resolve, and at level of support.

So far, I have collected these points from which I created my example:

1. Instructions were written by a non-technical communicator.
2. The second email distributed to begin implementation did not include the instructions.
3. Instructions written were incorrect and not tested.
4. Incomplete or incorrect information resulted in help desk calls.
5. During a one-week period, the help desk calculated close to 1,000 calls. Based on statistics sent by the help desk supervisor, of these calls 82% were resolved within seven minutes by first-level support.
6. Based on experience, the average cost for engaging the help desk is $20 per call—more expensive if the call is more complex and has to be routed to the next level support person.
7. $20 per call multiplied by 820 is $16,400.

The incomplete instruction document sent out was a six-page Word document with screen captures. The average time for a technical communicator to review/revise is about two hours per page, so this document would have taken 12 hours to complete and test. Using an average loaded rate of $66/hour, the cost for a technical communicator to review, revise, and test the procedure: $792. The cost comparison? $16,400 (no technical communicator) vs. $800 (with technical communicator)

And that's the impact of just *one* document. Imagine the cost savings multiplied by the number of incomplete or inaccurate documents distributed without the benefit of our professional technical communication services. The resulting cost saving is *huge*.

My Elevator Speech

"Technical communication adds value by providing correct and accurate content that is easy to consume, discoverable, reusable, coordinated with other company content, delivered dynamically, tested for accuracy, and saves the company money.

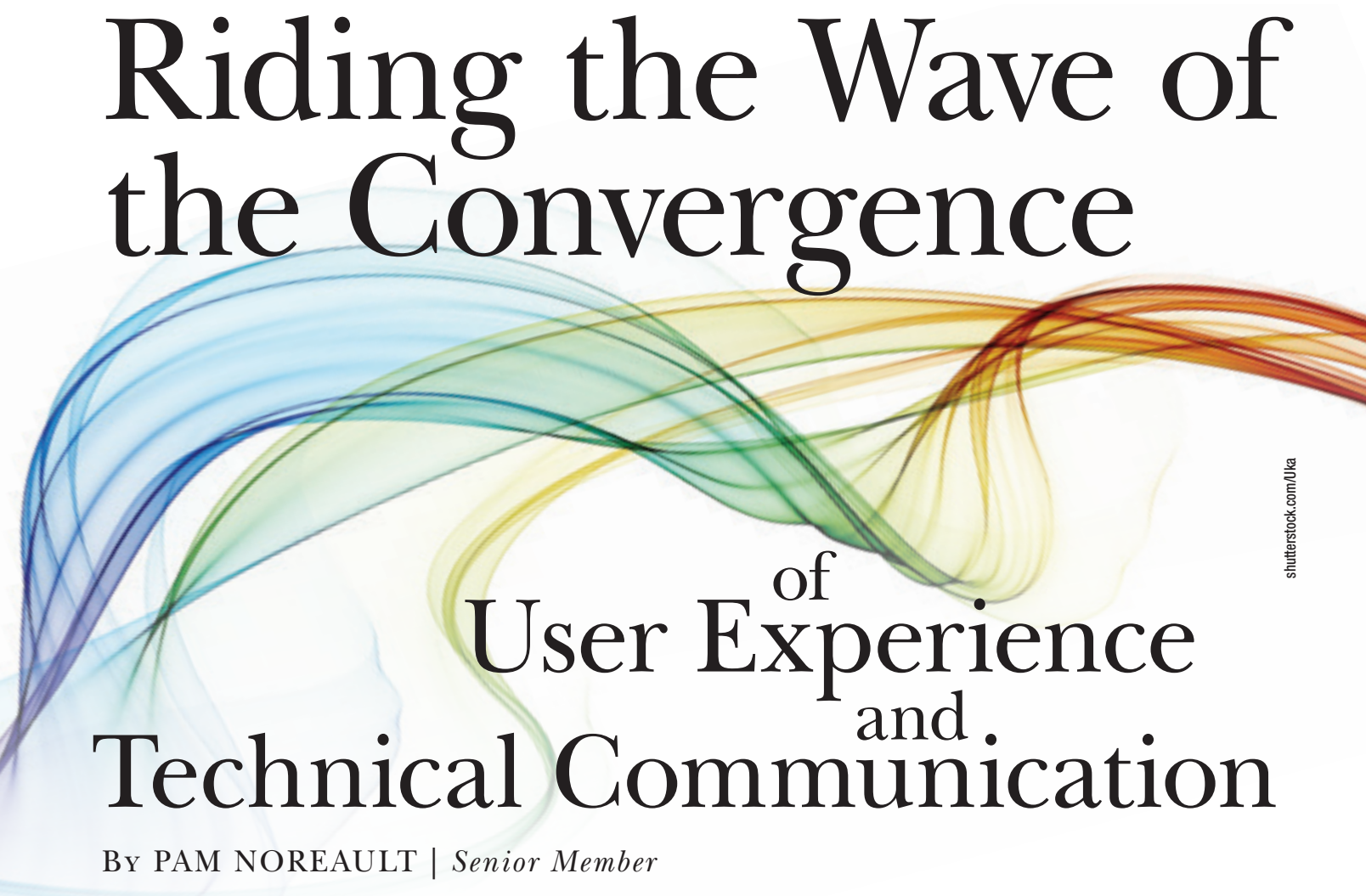
For example, instructions for a new security process implementation were written by an engineer and distributed company-wide. According to the help desk manager, they received 1,000 help desk calls in five days, with 82% of the calls resolved by level-one support in seven minutes. These calls could have been deflected if the document had been routed through a technical communicator, corrected, and tested before distribution. So 820 calls times $20 equals $16,400 versus having a technical communicator review, revise, and test in 12 hours at $66 per hour for a total of $792. And that's just *one* document."

Then I just stand back and watch the light bulb go on.

What's your elevator speech?

DEBRA JOHNSON *is president of the Orlando–Central Florida STC Chapter and the technical communication lead at Wyndham Vacation Ownership. Debra has 20 years' experience as a technical communicator in industries such as hospitality, banking, travel, utilities, government, insurance, telecom, and broadband communications.*

Riding the Wave of the Convergence of User Experience and Technical Communication



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By PAM NOREAULT | *Senior Member*

THE FOCUS ON user experience (UX) is white hot and it's not going away any time soon. We are in the "age of the customer," where bad customer experiences go viral on social networking sites and company revenue quickly takes a hit. The Internet gives us the power to research what others think about everything. Yelp and Amazon are prime examples of applications that gather opinions and aggregate the results. Undoubtedly, technical communication is part of the total user experience. However, if customers rule then companies must converge the user experience design (UXD) and technical communication disciplines so they are under the same umbrella.

Learn the Approaches and Find Opportunities

Undoubtedly, customer engagement and UX work together and are differentiators when it comes to creating content that engages customers in an ongoing conversation so that they are able to do their jobs more quickly and efficiently.

As a writer, you might flinch at having to spend time doing customer research and engaging customers because it adds time to your delivery schedule. You might also have no idea where to start and what to do with the information you gather. This article provides ideas on how to get started and how to act on the information that you uncover.

You can get started by taking advantage of opportunities within your company. Regardless of what you currently know, you can do something to move in the direction of customer engagement. After all, doing something is better than doing nothing.

Engagement Approaches

There are many things that you can do to engage customers and begin your user research journey. The key is to get the conversation started, foster it, and keep it going. Most importantly, stop talking to and start listening to customers. Keep in mind that it's not about asking customers what they want—it's about understanding how they work. Start with one or more of these approaches:

- Surveys
- Observations
- Interviews
- Contextual interviews (observe users doing their jobs)
- Card sorts (users organize topics into categories and help you label these groups)
- Usability tests

- Customer communities/partner programs/focus groups
- Prototyping
- Task analysis (observe users in action to understand how they perform their tasks and achieve their goals)

Engagement Opportunities

It can be hard for many writers to get access to their customers. It might not be easy, but it is absolutely necessary. You can start by looking for opportunities that already exist in your company. Consider the following options:

- Form partnerships with product management, marketing, sales, sales engineering, and customer support
- Form partnerships with UXD, if you have a UXD team in your company
- Review LinkedIn and other forums related to your company's line of business for useful information, conversations, and opinions
- Monitor Twitter to see what your customers are tweeting about
- Monitor your own company's tweets
- Find Facebook chatter about your company and its products

Any area of your company that interacts with customers is fair game. If you get nowhere with those partnerships, get creative. Think about using social networking sites to mine information. Join LinkedIn groups for your industry and post questions and surveys to obtain information. Seek input from users who are not your customers but who represent the same personas as your customers.

Create a Customer Engagement Strategy

Your customer engagement strategy does not have to be a daunting task. No strategy fits all situations, so create a small strategy for each specific situation. It should document:

- What types of engagement you are going to do
- When you are going to do it
- How you intend to use the information you gather
- How you plan to keep the conversation going

Strategy Example

For the two major releases of our software product this year, I am going to complete five customer interviews, observe the same five customers using our product, and pull all of the user assistance-related support cases that have been opened in the past year. Then using the information gathered from these customer engagement activities, I can improve my deliverables to better meet customer needs and determine new deliverables that will better meet customer needs. To keep the conversation going, I am going to share the improvements I made as well as my new deliverables with these five customers.

Measuring Success and Reporting Results

If you measure and report your success, you are more likely to gain support for customer engagement and user research going forward.

Measure your success:

- Measure "activity time" (how long it takes for a customer to complete a task using your product)
- Send out customer satisfaction surveys
- Measure the reduction in support calls around specific issues you addressed
- Ask customers to tout the positive experience in any way they can (case studies, testimonials, email/call to your manager, email/call to customer care manager, tweet, comments in company or social media forums, etc.)

Report your results:

- Decreased activity time
- Increased customer satisfaction with your deliverables
- Reduced support calls around the issues you addressed
- Positive PR from customers (there's nothing better than positive PR!)

Final Word

The wave of convergence for the UX and technical communication disciplines is happening. Companies expect technical communicators to know their users/customers.

If you want to ride this wave, but feel you need more training/education, consider:

- Obtaining a UX certificate or degree
- Taking online classes that focus on user research, measuring customer satisfaction, or accessing customer needs
- Attending free webinars on intelligent content, user research, measuring customer satisfaction, or accessing customer needs
- Networking and partnering with UX professionals

User documentation, embedded user assistance, and support content are part of the total user experience, and technical communicators need to be part of a larger UX team.

So get out your surf board, catch this wave, and ride it to success!

PAM NOREAULT *has 20-plus years of experience in communications, content management, and technical writing. She specializes in content reuse, topic-based content creation, DITA conversions, using social media in business, and trends in user assistance. When she's not researching and implementing new ways to involve customers, she can be found presenting at conferences.*

FURTHER READING

Goodman, Elizabeth; Kuniavsky, Mike; and Moed, Andrea. *Observing the User Experience, Second Edition: A Practitioner's Guide to User Research.* Waltham: Elsevier, 2012.

Gothelf, Jeff. *Lean UX: Applying Lean Principles to Improve User Experience.* Sebastopol: O'Reilly, 2013.

Lea, Wendy. "The New Rules of Customer Engagement," *Inc.com. Inc Magazine*, 5 April 2012, accessed 16 February 2014.

"User Research Basics," *Usability.gov.* US Department of Health & Human Services, 6 June 2013, accessed 16 February 2014.

Content and BRAND

shutterstock.com/My Life Graphic

By ALAN J. PORTER

I'M A BRAND JUNKIE. Outside of the office, the shoes I wear are nearly always Converse of various hues (I own 16 pairs and counting), I ride a Harley-Davidson motorcycle (and have a dozen t-shirts that announce the fact), I drive MINIs (currently own my eighth and ninth examples of the marque), and I prefer my fancy five-dollar coffees from Starbucks.

Apart from my predilection for mildly obsessive behavior, what is it about a brand that promotes loyalty and repeated buying cycles? What exactly do we mean when we talk about a brand?

Brand

When most people think about brand, it tends to be in terms of a memorable logo, like the Nike swoosh, the McDonald's golden arches, Starbucks' mermaid, Harley's bar and shield, and so on. Consequently, in many large organizations brand management and brand marketing are viewed as little more than "logo police." The truth is that brand is far more than just a logo and that brand management is far more than making sure your logo looks good on t-shirts.

A brand is the total summation of a company's culture, its business aims, and its promise to its customers. A good brand is an experience, and the best brands provide an experience and promise that links the enterprise to its customers at a personal and even emotional level. People go back to the same brand because they know what to expect, they know what the products do, and they know how they will be treated. Customers are even prepared to pay premium prices for that experience. I know I can buy cheaper shoes than Converse, drink cheaper coffee than Starbucks, and buy a good motorcycle for less than a Harley, but I'm happy to pay the extra to continue the relationship and experience of using those particular products, dealing with those particular companies, and even in some cases interacting with other brand fans.

A good brand can be a tangible asset to a company, just as important as other items on its balance sheet. For many of the top global companies, the value of their brand is measured in billions of dollars. That's a responsibility for brand managers that goes well beyond making sure that the logo is the right shade.

Brand Marketing

Good brand marketing goes beyond the logo to build on the promise of the brand to deliver a premium consistent customer experience that reinforces the value the brand provides. It's about answering four critical questions: why, who, what, and how.

Why? Why do you as a company do what you do? What need—be it a business, emotional, or social one—are you fulfilling for your customers?

Who? Who are your audiences? Not in terms of broad demographics or make-believe personas, but as real people, individuals who interact with your brand and use your products and services. How does your brand promise relate to their personal values, culture, and needs?

What? What stories can you tell about your brand that will resonate with your customers? How can you add value to what they do or the way they do it? That value can be something as objective as saving them money through lower fuel mileage or something as intangible as them getting a compliment and a smile because of the red shoes they are wearing.

How? How do you tell those stories in a way that your customers are engaged with your brand? Can you tell them in such a way that your customers will want to share and repeat their own stories of their experiences with your brand? Where will you tell those stories, and can you do it in a way that irrespective of which channel they consume those stories it's a consistent brand experience?

Brand and Content

While brand marketing may be about developing and delivering engaging stories that prove the value that you deliver to your customers, the overall brand experience is far more.

In fact, I'd go as far as to say that the brand experience is an essential part of every stage of your customer lifecycle no matter what point of engagement they are at. Brand goes way beyond interactions with the products themselves and the showrooms or stores. From first becoming aware of your products, through consideration, purchase, installation, and support, customers are constantly interacting with your brand—and content is central to that.

Marketing messages, social media, forums, websites, point-of-sale information, contracts, user guides, online help, technical documentation, customer support, parts sales, online purchasing, and user communities—all are brand interactions and all are content-driven.

Every time you publish something it's a brand experience, whether it's customer facing or not. Often it's just as important to build brand awareness and consistency of the value messaging inside the organization as it is outside.

Every piece of content you produce—text, graphics, photographs, animations, video, blog posts, social media messages, symbols, icons, colors, even emails—they are all brand. And every interaction with your content is a brand experience. Your content should reflect your brand promise and reinforce that brand experience.

> A good brand is an experience, and the best brands provide an experience and promise that links the enterprise to its customers at a personal and even emotional level.

Content is not just a part of brand marketing. It's not just about the right logo on the tech manual or the right product names in the online help. Content is not just something to be considered while creating brand campaigns; content is central to every brand moment.

Simply put, content *is* brand.

ALAN J. PORTER *has 20+ years' experience in corporate communications, marketing, and content development in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Alan is a catalyst for change with a strong track record in developing new ideas, embracing emerging technologies, and introducing operational improvements. He has been involved in the development and adoption of various industry standards, and is a regular speaker at industry conferences. He is also a published author with several books, comics, and numerous magazine articles to his name.*

MK Graphics

Technical Illustrations

Page Layout

Press Sheet Inspection

Design

Business Cards

Letterhead

mkgraphics53@gmail.com

STC Awards and Honors

INTERCOM IS PLEASED to honor and highlight all individual and community awards in a special section of the same issue. The members, chapters, and SIGS listed on these pages are the best and brightest our Society has to offer. They are at the forefront of our great profession, and we congratulate all of them on their success.

Please watch the STC website in the coming months for announcements on next year's awards and honors and how you can nominate yourself or a deserving colleague in 2014.

Introducing the New STC Fellows and Associate Fellows

STC IS PLEASED to announce that 18 distinguished members have been named Fellows and Associate Fellows of the Society. They will be recognized at the Honors Banquet at the 2014 STC Summit in Phoenix, AZ.

STC awards the rank of Associate Fellow to Senior Members who have attained distinction in the field of technical communication.

The rank of STC Fellow is conferred upon Associate Fellows who have attained such eminence in the field of technical communication that the Board deems them worthy of being singled out as one of the select few who have distinguished the Society and the profession.

All Summit attendees are welcome to attend the Honors Banquet; please purchase your ticket when you register for the conference. A limited number of tickets will be available for sale onsite.

Congratulations to all the honorees, listed below with the preliminary citation. And thank you to both the Fellows Committee (Cindy Currie-Clifford, Larry Kunz, and Linda Oestreich) and the Associate Fellows Committee (Linda Oestreich, Deirdre (De) Murr, Brian Lindgren, Carolyn Watt, and Michael Markley).

Associate Fellows

Beth Agnew
For a lifetime of continued dedication to technical communication as an ongoing learner, professor, and advocate, and for passionate promotion of both the profession and the practice.

Robert Rhyne Armstrong
For your pioneering work in the education of social media and social networking and the giving of your time and expertise to all levels of the technical communication communities and for your exemplary work in the student community.

Maria Antonieta Flores
For courage and persistence in your commitment to learning and exploring new technologies, and for your generously sharing your leadership, knowledge, and skills with the Berkeley Chapter, your STC colleagues, your coworkers, and your community.

Susan M. Haire
For generously sharing your expertise and inspiring technical communication learners and practitioners, for building bridges to their clients, and for your enduring commitment and contribution to the Manitoba Chapter and Society.

Mark Lewis
For your passionate contributions to the evolution of DITA and content management technologies, and for your generosity in sharing this with others without reservation within the Society and the profession.

Mike Murray
For clarity of vision, strength of purpose, power of communication, and creativity in leadership that has gracefully guided and deeply enriched the profession, the Society, the Central Florida community, and all who call him friend.

Cynthia Pao
For your dedicated service to STC at all levels and for advancing the technical communication profession by bringing the academic and industry communities together to motivate and engage their members.

Paula Robertson
For your continuous and passionate contributions of clear, concise, and accurate textual and visual information that satisfies the end user at the point of need.

Tricia Spayer
For your continuous promotion of the profession of technical communication, outstanding leadership and mentoring in the field, and engaging and effective presentations to audiences across disciplines.

Andrea J. Wenger
For your passionate commitment to clear and effective communication, promoting harmonious workplace relationships, and helping others on their path to professional development, and for dedicated service to STC and its communities.

Fellows

Donn R. DeBoard
For generous and sustained service to the Philadelphia Metro Chapter as speaker, mentor, and chapter leader; for innovation and inspiration in designing and creating customer-centered software documentation.

Joseph J. Devney
For dedication and commitment to STC at both the community and Society levels, and for consistent advancement of technical communication through knowledge sharing.

Leah Guren
For strong dedication and commitment to STC at all levels and to the profession of technical communication and its practitioners through myriad presentations and training events, and for advocating for global awareness within the Society.

Rebecca C. Hall
For excellence in designing and writing documentation that focuses on serving the customer, for guiding and inspiring colleagues, and for consistently setting a high standard of professionalism.

Robert B. Hanna
For dedication and commitment to STC, and for advancement of technical communication through structured authoring and single-source publishing.

Chris Hester
For generous and sustained service to the Chicago Chapter as a mentor and chapter leader, for dedication to the Technical Communication Summit through conference and program committee service, and for leadership in the technical communication and content strategy communities.

Paul Mueller
For exemplary dedication to the profession of technical communication, for leading successful project teams in a variety of disciplines, and for effective, visionary leadership that has enriched the STC Summit.

Kirk St.Amant
For academic research in the field of technical communication focused on the role information technology plays in globalizing best practices in technical communication and publishing extensively on your findings, and for bringing together members of different professional societies to foster inter-organizational collaboration.

Sigma Tau Chi

STC SPONSORS Sigma Tau Chi (STX) to recognize exemplary technical communication students in baccalaureate or graduate programs.

STX recognizes students enrolled in technical communication programs who have a cumulative grade point average of 3.5 or above, are exemplary in participation in STC, and demonstrate a potential for significant contribution to the profession. Students who are accepted into Sigma Tau Chi receive one year's membership in STC, a pin, and a t-shirt. The committee this year includes Pam Brewer, David Dayton, Kenneth Kittle, and Herb Smith.

This year, two students received this honor. Congratulations to both!

Anna Lerew-Phillips
Midwestern State University

Sara Schram
Michigan Technological University

Jay R. Gould Award

THE JAY R. GOULD AWARD for Excellence in Teaching Technical Communication honors the distinguished teaching career of the late Professor Gould, whose academic mentorship guided many into the technical communication profession. To be eligible for the award, a nominee must have been a member of the Society for Technical Communication for at least ten years and must have been involved in postsecondary education for at least fifteen years. The committee this year includes Tharon Howard, Thomas Barker, and Kirk St.Amant.

This year's winners are:
Pam Estes Brewer
Saul Carliner

The citations read:

Pam Estes Brewer
For your joyous and unequaled capacity to bring scholarship, professionalism, and the challenges of global communication into the classroom.

Saul Carliner
For your commitment to student success, your innovative approaches to teaching, and your dedication to mentoring the next generation of researchers and educators in the field of technical communication

Congratulations to Pam and Saul for their honor.

Ken Rainey Award

THE KEN RAINEY AWARD for Excellence in Research was established by STC in 2006 to celebrate and honor Professor Ken Rainey's passion for research that results in improvements to technical communication, especially to practice. The goal of the award is to encourage quality and excellence in technical communication research by honoring those whose research studies have made an outstanding contribution to the field. The committee for this year's award is Nancy Coppola, Ann M. Blakeslee, Patricia Egan, and Bernadette Longo.

This year's winner is Saul Carliner.

The citations read:

Saul Carliner
For his focused and established body of work and for his sustained research that serves as a foundation for effective practices in the profession.

Congratulations to Saul for this well-deserved honor.

Frank R. Smith Award

EACH YEAR, the editor of *Technical Communication* appoints a judging committee to select the outstanding article from the previous year's issues. Judges base their decisions on article content and form. The award honors the memory of Frank R. Smith, during whose 18-year tenure as editor *Technical Communication* became established as the flagship publication of STC and the profession. This year's judging team for the Frank R. Smith competition consisted of Avon Murphy, Hanna Jochmann-Mannak, and David Kowalsky.

The judges are pleased to announce that the Frank R. Smith Outstanding Article Award goes to Lisa Meloncon and Sally Henschel for their article, "Current State of U.S. Undergraduate Degree Programs in Technical and Professional Communication" in the February 2013 issue of *Technical Communication*. The abstract for the honored article states that it "updates Harner and Rich's 2005 survey of undergraduate degree programs in technical and professional communication (TPC) in the U.S. and provides information about the current number of degree programs, locations of degrees programs, and curricula, both required and elective."

The citation reads:

For their in-depth, critical review of 65 programs in technical and professional communication in the United States. Their analysis of trends between 2005 and 2011 uses a methodology that makes it easy to replicate their study.

In addition, the judges also named a Distinguished Article for the year. This honor goes to Hans van der Meij and Jan van der Meij for their article, "Eight Guidelines for the Design of Instructional Videos for Software Training" in the August 2013 issue of *Technical Communication*.

The citation reads:

For enunciating guidelines that can help us produce training videos that lead to increased motivation, proficiency, and retention of skills. The authors validate each guideline by connecting it to major experimental studies and closely analyzed examples of effective videos.

Congratulations to all the honorees.

Intercom Outstanding Article and Guest-Edited Issue Awards

STC INTRODUCES two new awards for 2014: the *Intercom* Outstanding Article of the year and the *Intercom* Outstanding Guest-Edited Issue of the year. This first year's judging team for the awards consisted of Bette Frick, Jack Molisani, and Andrea Wenger.

The judges are pleased to announce that the *Intercom* Outstanding Article Award goes to Alyson Riley, Andrea L. Ames, and Eileen Jones for their article, "Telling the Right Story: Proving the Business Value of Content" in the May 2013 issue of *Intercom*.

The citation reads:

For highlighting the need to prove the business value of content; for connecting data and storytelling with business goals like revenue streams, ROI, and successful conversions; for providing a direct tie between the content that technical communicators produce and the key performance indicators (KPIs) and metrics that drive broader business. The article inspires and resonates with technical communication practitioners, their colleagues and managers alike.

The *Intercom* Outstanding Guest Edited Issue goes to Alan J. Porter for the May 2013 issue, with a theme of content strategy.

The citation reads:

For guest-editing an issue of *Intercom* that provides readers with an essential primer to the growing field and discipline of content strategy; for compiling articles that showcase job growth, technologies and methodologies, vision, and alignment with other disciplines. The issue is an outstanding example of content curation around a single theme, providing new insights and ongoing conversation.

Congratulations to all the honorees.

Community Achievement Awards

THE COMMUNITY Achievement Awards (CAA) program recognizes STC Chapters and Special Interest Groups (SIGs) for exceptional accomplishments in meeting Society goals. The awards not only acknowledge that the obligations of a properly functioning community have been met, but that the winning communities have performed well beyond expectations.

The awards program recognizes, in a visible and meaningful manner, communities that demonstrate outstanding, innovative, and sustained performance in advancing the goals of the Society. Thank you to the awards committee, Tricia Spayer, Karen Lane, Mak Pandit, MaryKay Grueneberg, and Jamye Sagan.

Communities of Distinction

Chicago
For your impressive involvement with other technical communication communities—both within and outside of the Society—in promoting each other's events, as well as with the general community in hosting résumé review events.

Houston
For your overall strength in providing your members with a solid connection to the technical communication profession through your many educational programs and high commitment to volunteerism.

Northeast Ohio
For your dedication to your members and to the promotion of the technical communication field with an impressive number of initiatives and strong ties to the community and students in your area.

Orlando–Central Florida
For making change happen for the better—you have demonstrated the core of STC values by collaborating with multiple STC communities and educational entities.

Texas Tech University
For your outstanding service to students, bringing educational programs and professional development opportunities to future practitioners.

Communities of Excellence

Geographic Communities

Carolina
East Bay
New England
New York Metro
Philadelphia Metro
Phoenix
Rochester
Washington DC–Baltimore
Willamette Valley

Virtual Communities

Academic SIG
Instructional Design & Learning SIG
Technical Editing SIG

Communities of Merit

India

Distinguished Service Awards

THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION has long recognized the importance of the hard work and commitment of its community members. Without their energy and enthusiasm, the Society would cease to be the largest, most effective, and most prestigious organization of technical communicators in the world.

Below are the honorees this year for the Distinguished Chapter Service Awards, Distinguished SIG Service Awards, and Distinguished Service Award for Students. Congratulations to each of them and thank you for your service to the Society. And thank you to the members of the committee, Cindy Pao, Sarah Baca, and Linda Urban.

Distinguished Chapter Service Awards

IN 1988, THE SOCIETY initiated the Distinguished Chapter Service Award (DCSA) to recognize exemplary dedication to the chapter and its activities. The first awards were presented in 1989. Following is a list of DCSA winners for 2014 with their official citations.

Atlanta
Howard Speck
For sustained contributions to the Atlanta Chapter—for your service, encouragement, and sound advice over the years.

Berkeley
Susan Jaeger
For putting your leadership and management skills to work for the Berkeley Chapter during two terms as Secretary and in other significant volunteer positions.

Carolina
Christina Eftekhar
For sustained contributions to the Carolina Chapter—for your creativity, sound advice, and dedication to excellence in technical communication.

Chicago
Cynthia Laughlin
In recognition of your tireless efforts managing our STC Chicago Chapter Technical Communication Competition.

Chicago
Donna Wampach
In recognition of your exemplary dedication and loyalty to the STC Chicago Chapter while serving in the position of Secretary.

East Bay
Jane Olivera
For your dedication to STC and the members of the STC East Bay Chapter. For your services as President in 2012, guest newsletter editor, and continuous efforts to revitalize our Chapter's website. For being a constant and enthusiastic supporter of the Chapter, ensuring the Friendly Chapter's continued success.

Houston
Jowell Lydon
For your dedicated leadership and service to STC Houston, your drive to help others in any way possible, and all you do to promote the technical communication profession.

Northeast Ohio
Sharon Jendrisak
For outstanding leadership of the Northeast Ohio Chapter—for your enthusiasm, ingenuity, and commitment.

Northeast Ohio
Kim Lindsey
For your leadership, creative energy, and innovative ideas, all of which have contributed to the Northeast Ohio Chapter of STC.

Orlando–Central Florida
Mark Wray
For your many years of service to the STC Orlando–Central Florida Chapter as Chapter Treasurer, financial advisor, mentor, and Administrative Council Director.

Philadelphia Metro
Dr. Albert Brown
For sustained contributions to the Philadelphia Metro Chapter—for your wisdom, experience, and dedication.

Philadelphia Metro
Todd DeLuca
For your outstanding leadership of the Philadelphia Metro Chapter—for your inspiration, enthusiasm, creativity, and dedication.

Phoenix
Miachelle DePiano
For your unfailing willingness to initiate and wholeheartedly support innovative and successful AzSEF Committee activities and for your leadership as Vice President in maintaining the viability of the Phoenix Chapter at a time when few others stepped forward to help.

Phoenix
Jan Kruse
For outstanding leadership of the Phoenix Chapter—for your enthusiasm and creativity as Program Committee Manager, for your dedication as Chapter President to maintaining the viability of the Chapter in difficult times, and for your myriad contributions to Chapter activities.

Puget Sound
Barbara Alban
For your sustained contributions to the Puget Sound Chapter and your exemplary leadership as Chapter Secretary, Chapter Treasurer, and Membership Chair.

Rochester
Marilyn Woelk
For your leadership and prolific service to the Rochester Chapter—for your exemplary dedication, passion, ideas, and relationship-building skills.

Rocky Mountain
Michelle Despres
For your positive attitude and exemplary efforts to revitalize and increase Rocky Mountain Chapter membership in your role as Membership Manager and for your dedication as a member of our Nominating Committee.

San Diego
Nancy Rhoads
For sustained contributions to the STC San Diego Chapter—for your friendly and efficient hospitality, your whole-hearted support of Chapter activities, and your enthusiasm, creativity, and dedication to our Chapter.

Santa Barbara
Kathleen Gavenman
For inspiring the Santa Barbara Chapter's revival and, in your capacity as Webinars Chairperson, playing a pivotal role in its success.

Southeastern Michigan
Maryann Bowen
For your tireless commitment and outstanding contributions to the Southeastern Michigan Chapter and for your dedication and steadfast enthusiasm in supporting the vision and goals of the Chapter.

Southwestern Ontario
Paul Kostiuk
For your calm demeanor, reliability, professionalism, and loyalty to the STC Southwestern Ontario Chapter. Without you, we could have been up the creek without a paddle.

Southwestern Ontario
Ursula McCloy
For your long-standing commitment to the STC Southwestern Ontario Chapter, your promotion of STC's benefits, and your ability to balance your volunteer work with your commitment to your family.

Willamette Valley
Toni Mantych
For your dedication in advancing our profession and the Willamette Valley Chapter, providing strong leadership and organizational skills, sharing technical expertise, and promoting STC among students, our Chapter, and area professionals.

Willamette Valley
Rolf Vellek
For your behind-the-scenes support of the Willamette Valley Chapter—helping with the Chapter website, prompt responses on the jobs list, and enthusiasm for the Chapter and the profession.

Distinguished SIG Service Award

IN 2002, THE Society initiated a formal awards program to recognize the commitment and hard work of members of its special interest groups (SIGs). The Distinguished SIG Service Award (DSSA) recognizes length of SIG membership, consistency of service over the duration of membership, and variety of service.

Following are the winners of the 2014 Distinguished SIG Service Award and their official citations.

Academic
Craig Baehr
For your insight, wisdom, and willingness to serve in all Academic SIG initiatives. Your leadership has contributed to our excellent foundation.

Instructional Design & Learning
Jamye Sagan
For leading the IDL SIG, for your can-do attitude, and for your innovative ideas that have improved the SIG and helped our members.

Instructional Design & Learning
Maralee Sautter
For your consistent dedication to leading the IDL SIG and supporting its members, organizing its critical information, and promoting its image and activities.

Technical Editing
Ann Marie Queeney
For your consistent and devoted service to the Technical Editing SIG throughout your membership, and for your outstanding contributions to our quarterly membership programs.

Usability and User Experience
Meenakshi Khanna
For outstanding leadership of the Usability and User Experience SIG—for inspiration, enthusiasm, creativity, and dedication.

Usability and User Experience
Linda Patryas
For sustained contributions to the Usability and User Experience SIG to ensure an effective outreach program to new members.

Distinguished Service Award for Students

THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE Award for Students (DSAS) recognizes student members who provide exemplary service to the Society through their dedication to their chapter and its activities.

Following are the winners of the 2014 Distinguished Service Award for Students and their official citations.

East Tennessee
Dylan Alexander Platz
In recognition of your exemplary efforts to revitalize the East Tennessee Chapter, encourage student involvement, and advance Chapter activities.

Mercer University
Alesa Webber
For your outstanding service as President, and your dedication and professionalism in helping revive the Mercer University Student Chapter, 2012–2013.

Orlando–Central Florida
Candace Du Lac
For your enthusiastic and active involvement in Chapter activities, particularly your management of the 2012 State of the Chapter Survey results and your careful stewardship of the Community Achievement Award application process.

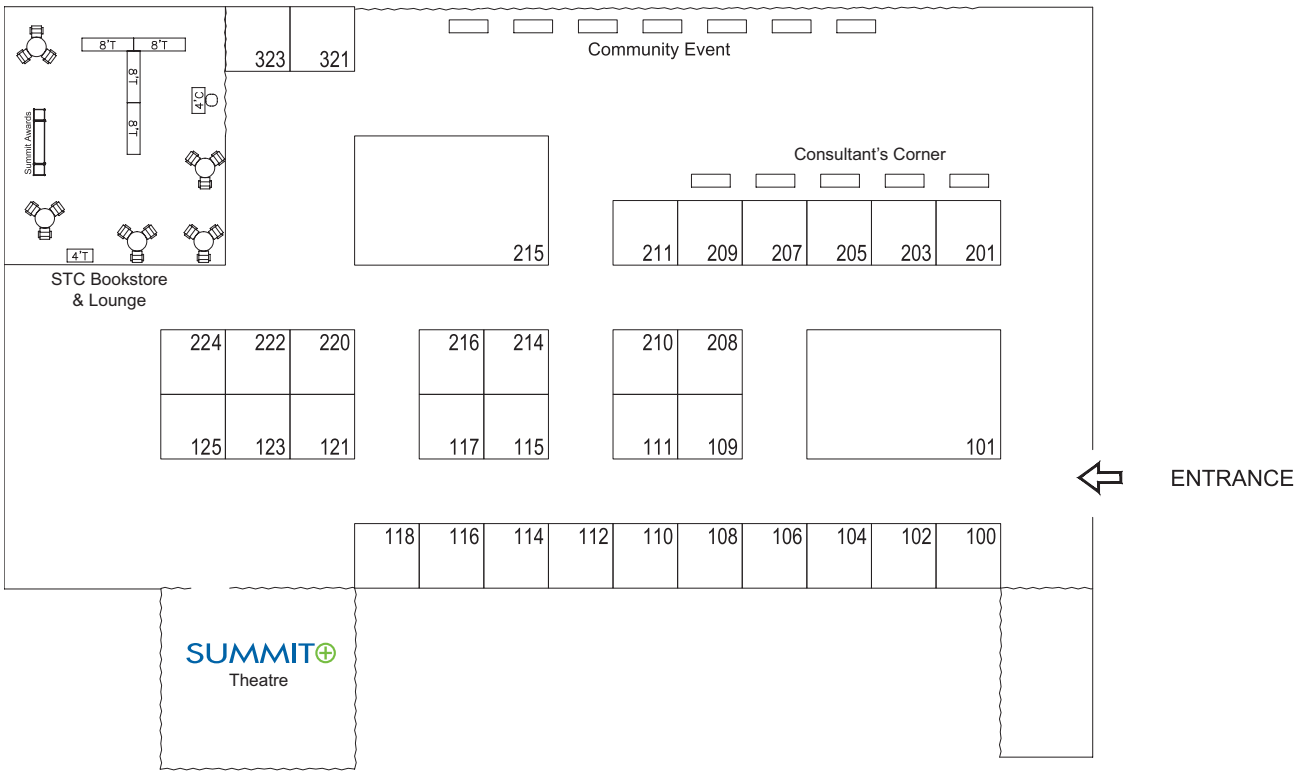
List of Exhibitors

WHO'S IN PHOENIX? See below for a preliminary list of exhibitors at the 2014 Technical Communication Summit.

**** denotes new exhibitor.*

Company	Booth	Website
A2Z Global Language Solutions	117	www.a2zglobal.com/
Acrolinx North America, Inc.	203	www.acrolinx.com/
Adobe Systems, Inc.	101	www.adobe.com
ALCERO ***	121	www.alcero.com/EN/Pages/default.aspx
American Medical Writers Association ***	116	www.amwa.org/
Antidot ***	208	www.antidot.net/en/
Arizona State University ***	118	www.asu.edu/
Arizona Technology Council ***	222	www.aztechcouncil.org/
Association of Independent Information Professionals ***	123	http://aiip.org/
D. S. SolidWorks	209	www.3ds.com
Doc-To-Help	100	www.doctohelp.com
easyDITA ***	115	www.easyDITA.com
eGloo Technologies Pty Ltd	104	www.eglootech.com/index.html
Information Mapping, US	216	http://us.informationmapping.com/us
JustSystems	111	www.xmetal.com
Kinetic TheTechnologyAgency™	112	www.kinetic.thetechnologyagency.com
Madcap Software	215	www.madcapsoftware.com
Net-Translators	211	www.net-translators.com
ProSpringStaffing/ The LavaCon Conference	205	http://lavacon.org/2013/
SDL	210	www.sdl.com
Single-Sourcing Solutions, Inc.	224	www.single-sourcing.com
SQUIDDS E.K.	108	www.squidds.de/en.html
STC Body of Knowledge	323	http://stcbok.editme.com/
STC Community Affairs Committee	321	www.stc.org/
Stilo	106	www.stilo.com/
TechSmith	201	www.techsmith.com/
ThirtySix Software	214	www.thirtysix.net
University of Wisconsin–Stout	207	www.stout.edu
Vasont Systems	110	www.vasont.com
WebWorks	109	www.webworks.com
Welocalize ***	220	www.welocalize.com/
Writing Assistance, Inc.	102	www.writingassist.com

Consultants Corner	
Hyper/Word Services	www.hyperword.com
Marshall Documentation Consulting	www.marshalldocumentationservices.com
Publishing Smarter	www.publishingsmarter.com/



Content Competency: How to Know If You Have It, and How to Get It If You Don't

shutterstock.com/igor kisselev

BY ANDREA L. AMES | *Fellow* and **ALYSON RILEY** | *Senior Member*

IN OUR MAY 2013 *Intercom* feature article ("Telling the Right Story: Proving the Business Value of Content"), we argue that it is our responsibility, as content professionals, to demonstrate and articulate the value of content in business. The article makes some assumptions about the value of content in your organization—it's there, you just need to find it, measure it, and use the data to convince people with wallets that it's a worthwhile continued (and perhaps increased) investment. That might be a big leap for your organization … perhaps the value *isn't* there, yet. If that's the case, what do you do? And what if you just don't know?

In our quest to get to the end game we described last year—content as an acknowledged, respected, and valuable business asset—we've traveled a long road. Frankly, we've not yet arrived at content nirvana. We have, however, been contemplating our journey along the way. Unable to turn off the incorrigible information architecture neurons in our brains, we've taken note of some patterns and organized them into a meaningful (we believe) framework that can help you to:

- Determine where you and your organization might be in the context of "content competency"—delivering the right content in the right experience (to the right person, at the right time, and in the right place)
- Progress from where you are to where you'd like to be—whether that's content nirvana or just a little further down the path to content nirvana

We've Come a Long Way, Baby: An Evolutionary Model

Our journey toward maximizing the business value of IBM's technical content began back in the 1990s when the Web was young (and so were we—big hair, grunge, and all). Back then, websites were winning design awards for visually disturbing uses of cell padding in HTML

This column explores the strategic aspects of information architecture and the tools to equip information architects (IAs) for success. Topics will address the business, strategy, user experience, and implementation of strategic information architecture, including organizational, content management, and tactical considerations. Send your comments, questions, and suggestions for future articles to *thestrategicia@pobox.com.*

tables and paragraphs of text densely populated with links to unpredictable and often ironic or poetic targets. While our design sensibilities have evolved, we aren't smug about it; we recall too intimately the blood, sweat, and tears—the triumphs, as well as the risks that didn't quite pan out—that it took to get us from there to here.

As we reflect back on 20-plus years of toil in this space, there's method in the madness. We've been on an evolutionary path, where each step along the way has been necessary and valuable. Our own history and current experience on the road to high-value content shows that it is possible to reap business value from your client content experience no matter where your organization currently sits on the road to maturity. Be of good cheer! You don't have to be a 20-year veteran of content strategy in order to deliver high business value and make a meaningful difference for your clients and users.

Figure 1 summarizes a few of the phases in our organizational evolution and expresses the trajectory of our development in the form of a model. (If you know us at all, you know we love models, right?)

In this image, the columns that line the X-axis depict the key aspects of client-facing content that we believe are necessary for an organization to maximize its business value. The Y-axis depicts increasing maturity from "initial" through "optimized"—the first and last stages common in many maturity models. While the details of each column might differ for you and your organization, we believe that the core ideas are useful in assessing where you are today, what you can do to maximize the value of your content right now, and where you need to be going. Let's take a closer look at a couple of key pieces.

Talking About a (Cultural) Revolution

The first column in Figure 1 concerns culture. For the purposes of this article, we're using a lazy shorthand definition for culture that blends together the ideas of "What do you value?" and "How do you think?" Our graphic puts culture first for a reason: culture is the foundation, the driving force behind every other facet of organizational maturity. In many instances, the mission (and funding!) of your organization shapes your values and the way in which you think as a worker within that organization. So when you think about culture, think about your own values and patterns of thought, but be sure to consider the differences and similarities between your worldview and that of your co-workers and the organization as a whole.

We discovered that one of the most influential aspects of culture

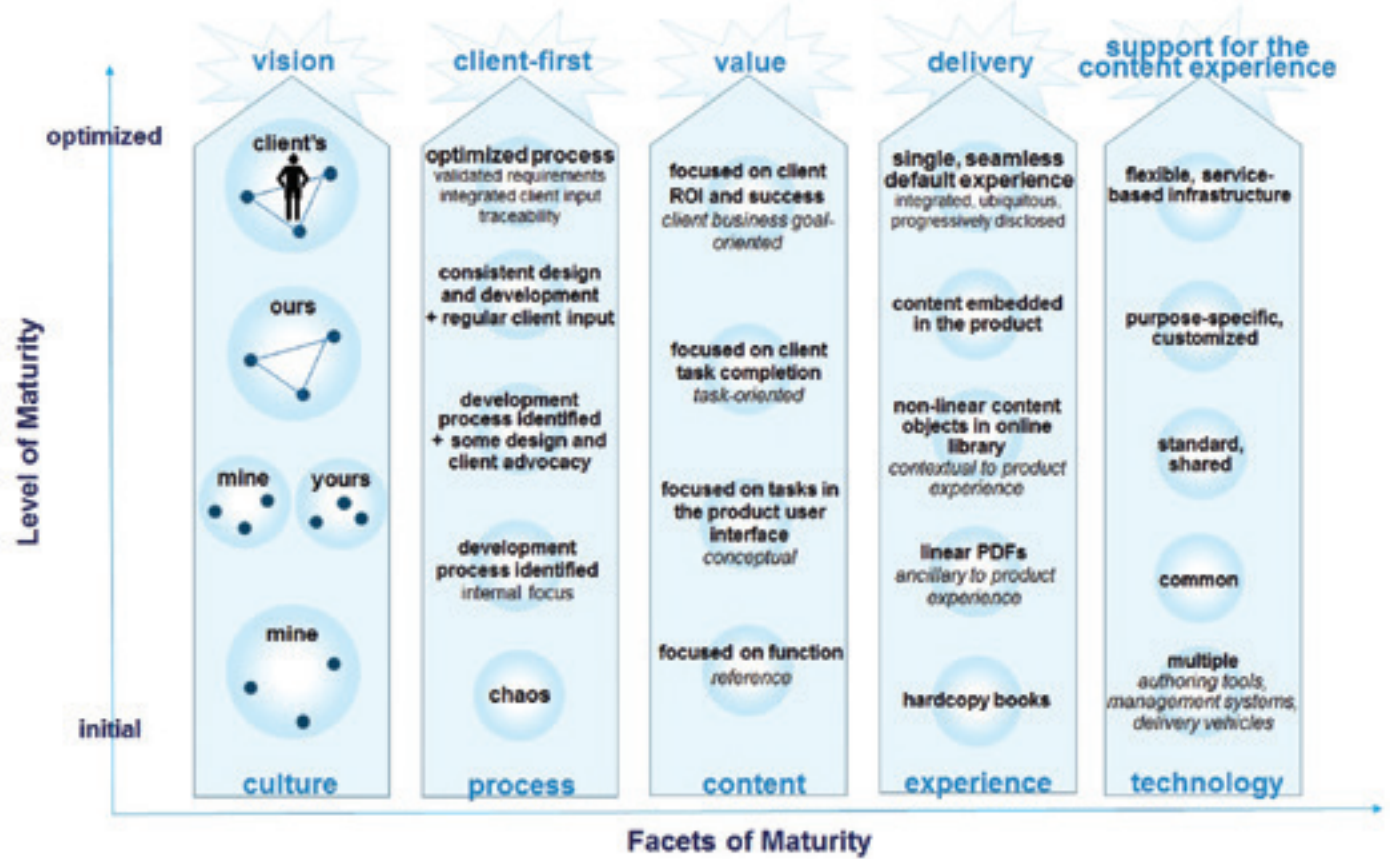


Figure 1. Examples from facets of the Content Competency Maturity Model

on our success with content strategy and promoting the business value of content involved our attitude toward silos: organizational silos, silos of content, silos of technology, silos of control. In the early days of our evolution, our scope was limited to official product documentation and our focus was limited to individual products and their components. In those days it was very easy for us to unconsciously nurture a siloed approach to content, where individual content creators wore institutional blinders that only allowed them to see "my content." Many were rarely aware of other players in the client content experience.

Much of the work of our content strategy team has been focused on changing this culture, helping teams to begin to discover the other players in the client content experience and start tearing down the conscious and unconscious silos that isolate people, teams, and content sets. This change in culture paved the way for our scope to grow such that we could fully embrace the total information experience and all of the content objects that clients encounter in their journey with IBM.

When content teams begin to think in a systemic way, the floodgates open, and that thought process becomes a natural part of the culture—to seek out connections, to analyze and shape the system as a whole, and to let go of a view limited to "my content" or even "our content" in order to focus on "the client's content" (that is, what matters most to the client's success). At that point in our growth toward maturity, we were able to drive massive, revolutionary change across our community of content producers.

When your culture truly values your clients' success more than preserving organizational boundaries and mission, the business of building things like modular, reusable content almost comes easily. This kind of "client first," dot-connecting culture is absolutely necessary when content strategy begins to address the organizational implications of eliminating redundancies and gaps, as well as the times when content curation activities force tough decisions about when to kill content. "My content" or "me first" thinking means that content never dies, even if metrics reveal that death to be a mercy to your clients.

Here are some questions to ask as you analyze culture within your own organization (and yourself—because, depending on who you talk to, either Gandhi or a bumper sticker told us that we should all be the change we wish to see in the world). Consider:

- Are you a destroyer of silos? Or do you build silos, putting up walls around your work and your content?
- Do you actively seek out connections? Or do you fear letting others into your domain or opening up your work for collaboration?
- Do you care more about client success than just about anything else? Or do you let fears about mission, funding, and "appropriate scope" dictate your priorities?
- Do you believe that your value stems from your ability to understand and advocate for those things that drive client success? Or do you believe that your best value comes from your domain expertise within a particular subject area?
- Are you the first one with the axe when metrics show that your content is no longer high value to clients? Or is it just too hard to allow your content to "go gentle into that good night"? (Thank you, Dylan Thomas.)

If this is an area in which your organization needs to evolve, we highly recommend you spend some time with metrics— invest in some hard work with metrics to determine:

- What your clients value (and don't)
- What your organization values (and doesn't)
- Where you have gaps between client and organizational values
- How to build a business case to bring organizational values into tight alignment around client values
- How to prove the value of your content using terms that your organization understands and appreciates—things like revenue generation, mindshare, ROI, and the like (and which we talk about at length in the article we referenced in our introduction)

For us, metrics allowed us to begin our cultural transformation. Once we had real client data, we used the voices of our clients as the most powerful agent of change for the cultural revolution we needed to get out of siloed thinking and evolve into a systems-thinking vision of an end-to-end, integrated, and enterprise-level client experience with content. And it's a revolution we're still driving.

Not More Process!

The second column in Figure 1 concerns process. In this column we consider the formal design and development processes common in product and service organizations. We also consider the critical characteristics of those processes, such as the extent to which they are client-validated, strategic, and metrics-driven. Culture captures how widely and deeply adopted process might be, and process describes the detail of the methods and characteristics practiced in those processes.

Many of us have a deep, visceral reaction to the word "process." A spectrum of responses might vary from bureaucracy (on the negative end) to predictability (on the positive end). Those of us who have created content in start-up (and not-so-start-up) chaos might breathe a sigh of relief at the thought of more process, while those who endure the torture of accomplishing seemingly minor tasks in large enterprise and governmental organizations might experience brain cramps of epic proportion at the thought of one more iota of process.

Process methodologies (such as development processes like Agile) can be very interesting, but we restrain ourselves from getting stuck on the perceived formality

of various process. We have a lot of process at IBM, and we've found a way to maximize the value of those processes without getting hung up on the details. We suggest that in your quest for content nirvana, you consider not process perfection, but rather those characteristics of process that enable and enhance your ability to deliver exceptional content and content experience.

Here are some questions to ask as you analyze process within your company, your team, and the organizational structures (like departments and divisions) in between:

- Is your job to make clients and users successful? Or does history and inertia keep you from championing your users as you feel you should? Has that same history and inertia spawned a library of questionably useful content?
- Does your organization understand and advocate for those things that drive client and user success? Or does technology (perhaps even for its own sake) drive the agenda?
- Does your product or service have a strategy? Does everyone on the team understand it and know how they contribute to it? Do product and service requirements derive (in part) from and serve that strategy?
- Do you design your products and services? Or are "cool" technologies built first, followed by a frenzied search for a market and target users?
- Does your organization validate requirements, designs, and implementations with users directly and with metrics? Or do you release products and hope for the best?
- Is your organization nimble and able to respond rapidly to changing requirements from the market or from your target users? Or do your process keep you stuck in a rut?

If you find you need an evolutionary boost in the process area, consider some metrics work again, this time gathering data focused on issues such as:

- Where and how your processes involve client and user touchpoints, if at all
- What your market and users need to accomplish in their business and day-to-day work
- What your market expects vis à vis your company's marketing content, the competition, their business needs, etc.
- How (or if!) your products are managed and designed
- How your products are developed

For us, the client (or user) is king. At the most basic level, until we know what they need and expect (requirements), validate our understanding of those requirements, validate designs as they are created and refined, and validate the product and content in the market, we don't know whether we are providing value in our content or just creating lots of words and pictures. (Gee, sounds a little like a process, doesn't it?)

Next Steps

In 2013, we gave you some data that you could use to start or energize your own efforts in proving the business value of content in your organization. Now, our goal with this column is to supplement our work last year—along with the excellent perspectives on the business value of content that appear elsewhere in this edition of *Intercom*—with a bit of practical advice. We gave you a starting point—culture and process!—for thinking about your own (and your organization's) content competency as well guidance for how to move forward down the path to content nirvana. In our next column, we will expand beyond that starting point to address other aspects of our model of content competency in a similar fashion. When that work is done, we hope to have provided our community with a detailed and comprehensive model of content maturity.

To that end, we also hope that this is the beginning of a conversation about tactics to help each other progress in delivering content and content experiences with measurably high business value. No matter where we are on the path to nirvana—no matter if we are newbies or battle-scarred veterans—we each can take positive steps forward and share our experiences for the advancement and longevity of our community. So how are *you* driving cultural revolution and process improvements in your world? What impact are those activities having on the business value of your content? What's working for you? We look forward to hearing from you.

ANDREA L. AMES, MS, *is an enterprise content experience strategist, architect, and designer at IBM, and she designed, coordinates, and teaches for the UCSC in Silicon Valley technical writing and communication program. Her mantras are "I don't write doc; I solve user and business problems"; "installation is not a user goal"; and "think more, write less!" She is Fellow and past president (2004–05) of STC and a distinguished engineer of ACM (the first technical communicator to achieve this distinction). She has published two award-winning technical books and more than 50 papers and articles, and she speaks regularly at conferences and professional meetings around the world. Follow her on Twitter (*@aames*), find her on LinkedIn (www.*linkedin.com/in/andreaames*), or check out her blog (*http://thinkmorewriteless.wordpress.com/*).*

ALYSON RILEY*'s mother swears that her first word was actually a complete sentence, and she began her career as an information architect shortly thereafter by developing organization schemes for her toy dinosaurs and horses. At the time this column was written, Alyson served as a senior enterprise content strategist on the corporate Client Technical Content Experience team within IBM's CIO organization. Alyson drove content-centric business transformation through her work leading IBM's corporate-level efforts in content strategy and consulted with IBM content teams worldwide to develop effective content strategies for the portfolio of IBM products. She has since taken her skills in strategy, requirements analysis, relationship building, and storytelling to a new context. Alyson now brings a content strategist's passion for content and systems-thinking perspective to her new work in driving business transformation initiatives at the Mayo Clinic.*

Multimedia Instructional Videos: Considering the Value of Intercultural Communication

JANINE M. BUTLER | *Guest Columnist*

IF OUR OBJECTIVE as technical communicators is to design usable and accessible information, then that purpose is even more essential in today's international workplace. Some of us are members of multinational corporations that have expanded overseas; others are part of local businesses with employees who speak different languages. In all cases, we promote our organizational mission by conveying meaning through many methods to a multilingual workforce. Video-based communication methods can bridge the gap between languages and cultures. This article demonstrates the value of creating videos that use multiple means to instruct and inform diverse members of an organization.

Instructional Videos in the Workplace

Corporate videos, training videos, and safety videos are some of the channels through which businesses instruct employees on how to perform operations within an organization. However, videos that rely excessively on voice-over narration and subtitles pose challenges to the members of the organization because:

- Technical communicators need to translate both the verbal narration and subtitles from English to the language of the organization's employees who will use the video. In such situations, mistranslations can easily arise, especially when trying to distill complicated information to concise information for videos.
- Employees who view videos with heavy use of (inadequately) translated verbal narration and subtitles will struggle to make meaning of the information and may not be able to efficiently access the information.
- The organization will suffer from failures or delays as a result of ineffectively conveyed information.

Technical communicators can actively design information in a way that prevents mistranslation and avoids concepts being lost as they cross from the originating language to the employees' language—and thus preserve the integrity of the organization and its mission.

Instead of emphasizing verbal narration and subtitles to the exclusion of other modes of communication, we can design videos that incorporate visual animation, still images, graphics, and other methods of expressing information.

Speech Codes: A Theory of Culture and Communication

To prevent an organization's concepts from being lost in translation, we should approach the design of instructional videos with an understanding of how cultural communication systems differ. An understanding of cultures and their *speech codes*, or cultural system of communication, is possible through what is known as speech code theory.

Speech code theory helps individuals understand communication practices unique to cultural groups. A leading proponent of speech code theory, Gerry Philipsen (1997), focused on understanding

- The relationship between communication and culture
- How each culture has its own way of speaking

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Philipsen claimed that each culture has a distinct cultural code. Just as a code of ethics guides how we behave in a certain moment, a speech code guides what we say and how we say it. Each culture values its ethics, and each culture values its language. At the same time, the language of any one culture will reflect its communal values.

In other words, culture and speech codes are inseparably connected, and each culture has its own valued principles of communication that are unknown to individuals from outside of that culture. However, the values and codes of one culture will not necessarily translate directly to another culture and another language. For instance, instructions written in the language of a culture that values self-reliance and perseverance may become awkward when rewritten in the language of a culture that values collaborative efforts and flexible deadlines. Even a single paragraph that gives orders for a task to be accomplished promptly will not be received well by employees who expect instructions to ask them to perform collaboratively and flexibly on a task.

What can we derive from speech code theory?

- Culture, language, and values are intricately linked.
- Attempting to translate

This column features the work of individuals currently enrolled in or recently graduated from educational programs in the field. Contributors examine how theories and concepts encountered in their classes can be applied to technical communication practices. To submit a column, email the editor at *STAMANTK@ecu.edu.*

spoken narration or to use subtitles in videos may fail to adequately express meaning in another culture and language.

How can we apply the concept that each culture has its own communication codes in the workplace?

- In the age of globalization, workplaces are multicultural, multilingual spaces.
- Instructional videos should utilize different ways of expressing meaning and delivering information across cultures and languages.

Technical communicators can apply the concept of linked cultural values and behaviors in the workplace. By appreciating the differences in cultural systems of communication, we can better design effective means of video-based communication.

Multimedia Videos in the Workplace

When we realize that each culture has its own communication codes, how can we prevent the mistranslation of cultural values in the workplace? We can do so by embracing multimedia videos that integrate verbal narration and subtitles with visual animation, still images, and physical means of expressing information. We have already begun to integrate video-based communication in the workplace. In the May 2009 issue of *Intercom*, Barbara Giammona listed innovative directions in technical communication that include:

- Video demos embedded in user information
- Multimedia tutorials
- Video display terminals throughout the workplace to deliver information to users

The availability of informational videos in the workplace has the positive side effect of minimizing the need for print user's manuals and the reliance on language to convey information. When we translate manuals and other instructional documents, difficulties in translating concepts across languages and cultures often occur—and we experience firsthand the speech code concept of distinct cultural communication codes and values.

Translators must attempt to transmit factually correct instructions at the same time they interpret the language in order to account for cultural, grammatical, and syntactical differences in how instructions are stated. We may be quite familiar with humorous mistranslations in signs and user's guides, but there is no humor or value in accidentally giving the wrong instructions to our colleagues. Videos, and their use of multiple means of communication, can be a more efficient and less error-prone method of expressing information to users.

As technical communicators serve a larger role in the development of organizational knowledge, we can design informative multimedia videos that use different means of communication—sound, subtitles, graphics, and so forth—integrated in one space. Verbal narration and subtitles are not the only means of expressing information. Visual animation, still images, and physical action play a large part in expressing meaning throughout distinct communication codes.

Multimedia Videos: Minimizing Cultural Differences in Professional Communication

We can appreciate the speech code concept that each culture has its own distinct speech code and design videos for users from various cultures. Technical communicators can design multimedia instructional videos that effectively bypass language differences and effectively deliver usable, accessible, and meaningful information to users.

Speech code theory guides our understanding that culture, language, and values are intricately linked, and that instructional videos should communicate valuable information across cultures and languages. We can now realize that the most efficient multimedia instructional videos will have the following qualities:

- They minimize differences in speech codes—differences in cultural and language values—through their use of multiple modes, or methods of expressing meaning.
- They coordinate the modes of moving images, still images, written text, and narration so that users can understand the information through different means.
- Each mode conveys meaning differently. Morain and Swarts (2012) indicate that:
  - Moving images are best at showing actions and events occurring through time.
  - Spoken narration is effective when it announces steps right before the video visually demonstrates a task.
- Spoken narration and subtitles are not the primary means of giving instructions.

It is important to emphasize that the most efficient videos will combine narration, subtitles, visual animation, graphics, and the like. When meaning is expressed through several modes, viewers can access, understand, and use the information. For instance, Alexander (2013) found that the combination of voice-over narration and visual animation improves users' processing and retention of information. The usability and accessibility of a video thus enhances its value to employees with diverse speech codes and to international organizations.

An organizational video that uses multiple modes to provide instructions—narration, subtitles, visual animation, images, graphics—can successfully minimize differences in employees' speech codes. The narration and the subtitles may mistakenly include errors or imperfections, but the combination of animation, images, and other visual elements can correctly demonstrate the instruction. Multimedia instructional videos thus are an effective way to communicate an organization's message to its international workers.

Usability + Accessibility = Meaningfulness and Value

We can agree that one of our main purposes, if not the main purpose,

as technical communicators is to enhance usability. Facilitating the exchange of information between our colleagues is the value we contribute to our organization. Users value learning efficiently and quickly from instructional videos, and that would not be possible if they misunderstood spoken instructions due to differences in speech codes. When it comes to instructional videos, explicit and straightforward delivery of meaning is of paramount importance.

Employees who speak different languages deserve equal access to the instructional message of a video. When we design videos that incorporate other elements in addition to spoken narration, we allow employees who may not understand the narrator's language to access the necessary information. We can design videos that zoom in on particular positions, use superimposed arrows to pinpoint specific sections, or demonstrate complex actions in slow motion.

We can take the speech code concept that each culture has its distinct values and codes to determine what makes an effective video. That determination is the following:

- An effective video in the international workplace will complement any necessary voice-over narration and subtitles with visual animation, still images, graphics, and other means of expressing meaning to employees. In doing so, it is usable, accessible, and meaningful.

Through our appreciation of speech code theory, we become aware of how to design usable and accessible videos that successfully share meaningful information throughout the international workplace. Such videos consolidate the value of the technical information being communicated, of the employees, and of the organization.

How We Should (and Should Not) Design Videos

An awareness of speech code theory can allow us to design more effective videos that are usable, accessible, and meaningful for employees of different cultural backgrounds. We can begin by redesigning the average—and flawed—instructional video.

A basic instructional video features a person facing the camera and giving extensive spoken instructions with minimal visual actions. Some videos may be dubbed over (with grammatical errors or cultural differences); some may include (mistranslated) subtitles. Others may feature voice-over narration providing instructions while the task is performed on camera, but the narration predominately gives the directions while the visual actions play a supporting role.

If we apply speech code theory to these conventional videos, we can see that they do not effectively deliver information across cultures and languages. Even though they incorporate visual actions, language is the primary means through which they give instructions. Since each culture has its own values and codes of speaking, the language in the videos cannot perfectly translate instructions to viewers of different backgrounds.

When we apply speech code theory to designing videos, we coordinate spoken and written language with visual images, animation, and graphics that clearly and effectively communicate technical instructions. We take advantage of what videos make possible: we use different modes to express meaning—not just spoken or written words, but also visuals. We create multimedia videos that are usable, accessible, and meaningful to every single employee in our organization. Those who may not fully comprehend (the perhaps mistranslated) spoken or written instructions can ultimately visualize the meaning through the combination of modes.

When we design multimedia videos, our colleagues can then access and make use of the instructions by performing their task within the organization. By being aware of differences in cultural speech codes when designing multimedia instructional videos, we can improve the efficiency of the organization as a whole.

Value of Video-Based Technical Communication in the Workplace

Technical communicators can design videos that express meaning in multiple ways to create accessibility to meaning across languages and cultures. When employees access instructions through spoken words, visual captions, visual animations, and physical actions, they can efficiently use that information and make meaning in different ways. Through this integration, technical communicators and our colleagues contribute to the informational value of the organization. Even more meaningfully, we in the international workplace show that we value our colleagues' cultural and individual differences. i

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Mark Your Calendar

Organization events across the globe

F.Y.I. lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to *intercom@stc.org.*

1 18–21 May
The **Society for Technical Communication** hosts the Technical Communication Summit at the Hyatt Regency Phoenix and Phoenix Convention Center in Phoenix, AZ. For more information, contact:
STC
+1 (703) 522-4114
http://summit.stc.org

2 26–29 May
Join the **Association of Proposal Management Professionals (APMP)** for their Bid & Proposal Con at the Sheraton Hotel & Towers in Chicago, IL. For details:
APMP
www.apmp.org

3 9–12 July
The **User Experience Professionals Association (UXPA)** 2014 International Conference, with a theme of Motivation, will be held at the Park Plaza Westminster Bridge in London, England. For more information contact:
UXPA
conf2014@uxpa.org
www.uxpa2014.org

4 8–11 Oct
The **American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)** will hold its 74th annual conference, with a theme of "Shake, Rattle, and Write," at the Memphis Cook Convention Center in Memphis, TN. For more information, contact:
AMWA
+1 (301) 294-5303
amwa@amwa.org
www.amwa.org/events_annual_conference

5 13–15 Oct
The **IEEE Professional Communication Society (PCS)** hosts IPCC2014, Meeting Grounds: Lifelong Learning, from Classroom to Workplace, at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA. For more information, contact:
IEEE PCS
http://pcs.ieee.org/ipcc2014/

6 26–29 Oct
The **Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)** hosts their international conference, "Leading the Way: A Fearless Future for PR," at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, DC. For more information, contact:
PRSA
+1 (800) 350-0111
www.prsa.org/Conferences/InternationalConference/

7 31 Oct–4 Nov
The **American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T)** will hold its Annual Meeting, with a theme of "Connecting Collections, Cultures, and Communities," at the Sheraton Seattle Hotel, Seattle, WA. For more information, contact:
ASIS&T
asis@asis.org
www.asis.org/asist2014/

8 5–8 Nov
The **American Translators Association (ATA)** will hold its 55th annual conference at the Sheraton Chicago in Chicago, IL. For more information, contact:
ATA
+1 (703) 683-6100
ata@atanet.org
www.atanet.org/conf/2014

* STC-related event

Practicing What I Preach

BY JACK MOLISANI | *Fellow*

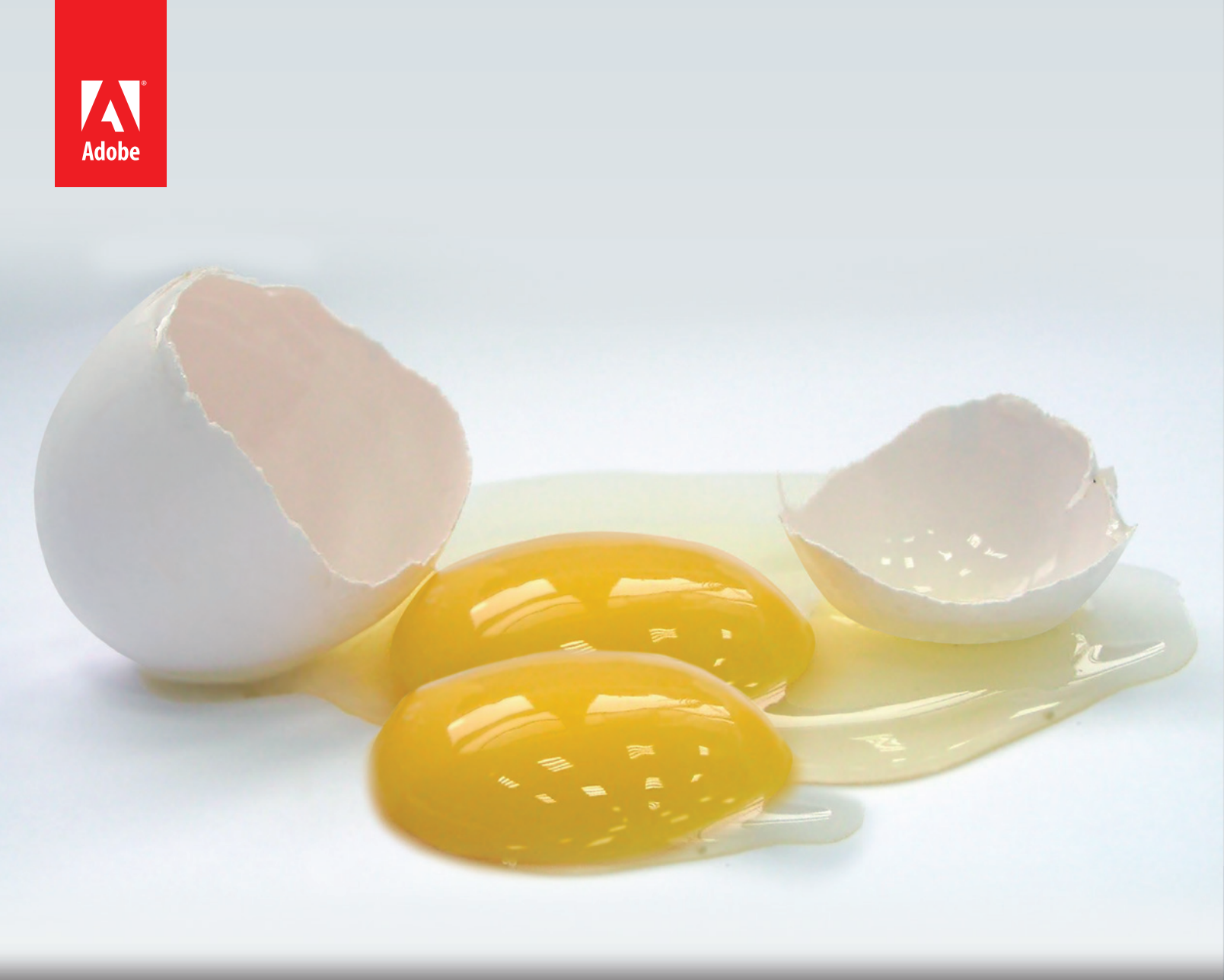
I'VE BEEN SAYING for years that technical communicators (as a group) have a wide range of professional skills, skills that can make you successful in not only tech comm, but also in a myriad of related fields. I've also coached audiences that, to survive the rough times (and there will always be rough times), you should have multiple income streams, a career fallback plan, and finally a future plan to where you want your career to go in the long term.

So when I was asked to write about *my* job in the month's issue, I thought, "Time to see if I practice what I preach!"

- **Technical writer:** I started my technical writing career well over 20 years ago. I still create my website copy, organize my conference program, and occasionally help a prior client with small jobs here and there.
- **Salesperson**: At one point I decided I no longer wanted to work 40 hours a week for other companies, so I started my own outsourced technical writing company. At first I found gigs and did the writing myself; later I concentrated on the business development end and brought on a business partner to create and deliver the projects.
- **Recruiter**: When clients started asking to help them find qualified candidates, I started a staffing division of the company specializing in programmers, project managers, and technical writers. Since I've done those jobs, I really understand what clients are looking for when hiring.
- **Conference producer:** In 2000 I helped organize the STC Region 7/8 Pan-Pacific Conference in Honolulu. At the end everyone was saying, "I can't wait until the next one!" There were no plans to do another Region 7/8 event, and I also didn't want to waste two years of hard-won meeting planning experience, so I decided to start my own commercial conference. Since part of the success of the first conference was having it in Hawaii, I decided to have my conference in Hawaii, too (hence the name "LavaCon").
- **Public speaker:** While I had been speaking at my local chapters soon after I joined STC, I starting to speak at chapters across the United States (and a few teleclasses abroad) as a way of promoting both my companies. What most chapters wanted to hear about was career advice from a professional recruiter, so that was the area I would speak about: the top 10 mistakes writers make when looking for work, how to ace an interview using a portfolio, and other job-hunting secrets I learned from years of being in the business.
- **Published author:** I've lost count of how many times people who attended my sessions and workshops said they applied what I taught and immediately got a new or better job. Ditto when these same people said, "You should put this in a book!" Last Fall I ran across a publisher at a networking event who asked me what I do (try answering *that* question in a sentence!). She was intrigued and eventually offered me a book deal. So I took all the lessons I learned in life, in my job as a recruiter, and in my job as a conference producer, and wrote, *Be the Captain of Your Career: A New Approach to Career Planning and Advancement* (now shipping from *Amazon.com*).
- **Full circle:** I marvel sometimes at how all the various jobs I've had in my career have given me skills that (at the time) seemed a bit esoteric or dead-end, they have also given me the core competencies to do what I do for a living. I help candidates who need or want a new job and companies needing good talent. I produce educational conferences in fun places that give attendees the skills they need to save their companies money, generate revenue, and advance their own career in the process. I get to travel for public-speaking roles and had my book published, both of which continue to change people's lives for the better. And I've done all of this from the core competencies of technical communication.

Over the years I have specifically chosen jobs I can do remotely, as I knew that someday my parents would need some help in their golden years. So greetings from Jacksonville Beach, FL. As soon as I email this to my editor, I'm running over to see the folks. Since many of you have met them working the LavaCon registration desk, I'll let them know you say hello. I'm sure they'd want me to say hi in return!

The author with his parents.



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